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GST INCLUSIVE

SET YOUR ALARM BELLS

By Peter Damalas

Australia faces a tricky test of character and resolve in tomorrow morning's (AEST) friendly match with Venezuela.

National coach Frank Farina recognised the importance of this fixture in the lead up to the 2006 World Cup campaign, when he announced a full strength twenty-man squad last week.

Win, lose or draw, the ninety minutes will certainly prove beneficial for the players and the coach, who will no doubt take a lot out of this trip for 2005, when Australia (should they win in Oceania) will again take on the might of the fifth best South American nation.

Two of the last three World Cup campaigns have ended for the Socceroos on the continent, at the stifling Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires in 1993, and in Montevideo in 2001.

Australia must learn how to scrape positive results away from home, considering that two-legged play offs are usually closely contested.

Clearly, the cream of Australia's footballing talent will need to acclimatise to the conditions and the hostile reception of the supporters if they are to have any chance of participating in the finals in Germany.

And this is a good step towards achieving that goal.

Venezuela will prove worthy opponents for Messrs Kevel, Emerton and Moore- they are no longer the whipping boys of CONMEBOL. Their results over the past three years have indicated that soccer is on the rise (they have jumped from 111 to 55 in the world ranking's), in a country widely known for its women, oil and obsession with baseball. The national team's nickname is vinotinto, and just like red wine, the football has matured with age.

Like Paraguay, who are on top of the qualifying standings after four rounds, Venezuela are a hard working team with few recognised stars, the majority of players are based at home, in Mexico or in other South American leagues.

Veteran goalkeeper Gilberto Angelucci provides the team with experience, while 23 year old winger, Juan Arango, is perhaps the most dangerous player in the squad, particularly with his long range shots and aerial power.

They currently lie fifth in the qualifying standings, the crucial position as far as Oceania is concerned.

Farina has stuck with the majority of players that appeared in last year's friendlies against England, Republic of Ireland and Jamaica.

Notable absentees, however, are Perugia goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac and captain Paul Okon, whose lack of game time has ruled him out of selection. Glasgow Rangers stopper Craig Moore is expected to be named captain.

This may be the first time Italian based midfielders Vince Grella and Marco Bresciano play together from the start, in what is shaping up as an industrious and creative midfield.

The match will take place at the Estadio Olimpico, which belongs to the local university.

SOCCEROOS & VENEZUELA

*John ALOISI	
Club Atletico Osasuna	SPAIN
Marco BRESCIANO	
Parma Associazone Calcio	ITALY
*Scott CHIPPERFIELD	
FC Basel 1893	SWITZERLAND
Simon COLOSIMO	
Parramatta Power SC	AUSTRALIA
Ahmad ELRICH	
Parramatta Power SC	AUSTRALIA
David ZDRILIC	
Aberdeen	SCOTLAND
*Vincenzo GRELLA	
Empoli Calcio	ITALY
*Harry KEWELL	
Liverpool FC	ENGLAND
Steve LAYBUTT	
Royal Excelsior Mouscron	BELGIUM
Stan LAZARIDIS	
Birmingham City FC	ENGLAND
Craig MOORE	
Rangers FC	SCOTLAND
Kevin MUSCAT	
Millwall FC	ENGLAND
Lucas NEILL	
Blackburn Rovers FC	ENGLAND
Michael PETKOVIC (gk)	
Trabzonspor Kulubu	TURKEY
Tony POPOVIC	
Crystal Palace	ENGLAND
Mark SCHWARZER (gk)	
Middlesbrough FC	ENGLAND
*Josip SKOKO	
Genclerbirligi Spor Kulubu	TURKEY
Mile STERJOVSKI	
Lille Olympique SC	FRANCE
Tony VIDMAR	
Cardiff City FC	WALES

*In doubt

Gilberto ANGELUCCI - Mineros de Guayana, Venezuela
Rafael DUDAMEL - UA Maracaibo, Venezuela
Jobanny RIVERO - Caracas FC, Venezuela
Jose Manuel REY - Caracas FC, Venezuela
Andrés Rouga - Caracas FC, Venezuela
Luis VALLENILLA - Caracas FC, Venezuela
Jonay HERNANDEZ - Dundee, Scotland
Alejandro CICHERO - Nacional, Uruguay
Héctor GONZALEZ - Colón Santa Fe, Argentina
Leopoldo JIMENEZ - UA Maracaibo, Venezuela
Luis VERA - Caracas FC, Venezuela
Jorge ROJAS - Caracas FC, Venezuela
Leonel VIELMA - Deportivo Tachira, Venezuela
Andree GONZALEZ - Plaza Colonia, Uruguay
Gabriel URDANETA - Kriens, Switzerland
Juan ARANGO - Puebla, Mexico
Alejandro MORENO - Los Angeles Galaxy, United States
Massimo MARGIOTTA - Vicenza, Italy
Ruberth MORAN - UA Maracaibo, Venezuela
Alexander RONDON - Deportivo Tachira, Venezuela

AFKOS QUITS LIBERAL PARTY OVER DRUG SCANDAL

By Richard Kreider

Former Soccer Australia director and Perth Glory part-owner Paul Afkos has had to quit his new Liberal Party seat of Stirling after alleged dealings with an accused drug trafficker.

A loan of $300,000 was said to have been given to him on recommendation that he invest in Afkos' hotel development, which is being built in Greece.

Police detectives went to the former soccer executive's Balcatta office in November last year, 10 days after $5 million worth of amphetamines was found in a utility owned by the Afkos company, which was being driven by the drug trafficker at the time of his arrest.

He said his decision to leave the Perth marginal seat of Stirling on Saturday was a personal one.

Afkos, who claims Party officials had known for two months about the borrowed money, was only recently given public support of the Prime Minister, John Howard.

Marconi Grabs Cash, Cup and Points

By John Economos

Marconi last Saturday night in defeating Sydney United 3-0 not only grabbed the three vital League points, but also took out the Capitol Hill Estate Cup plus the $25,000 cash that went with the victory.

The cup and cash were donated by a syndication of local businessman men to boost interest in Soccer in the outer Western region of Sydney between these two clubs over the two rounds they had met in the NSL this season.

Marconi drew 1-1 with United in the first round but proved much stronger last Saturday night at the Marconi Stadium with two first half goals hitting the target through twin strikers Alex Brosque and Jeromey Harris. Midfielder Chad Gibson added the third in the 65th with a direct out-swinging free-kick from 25 metres.

Points on a 3-2-1 basis were awarded for the Best Players in both games to find a winner for a cheque of $1,000.

However after votes were awarded last Saturday night at Marconi Stadium the result was a dead-heat between experienced Marconi's striker Joe Spiteri and playmaking midfielder Nicky Carle.

(Continued on page 7)

Marconi's happy four coach Jean Paul De Marigny, Nicky Carle, Joe Spiteri and captain Brad Maloney.

LIVE TV/RADIO BROADCAST — SOCCEROOS vs VENEZUELA

The upcoming international friendly match between the Socceroos and the national football team of Venezuela and South Africa will be broadcast LIVE and EXCLUSIVE on SBS Television.

In their first international for 2004, the SOCCEROOS will take on VENEZUELA at the Olympic Stadium in Caracas. The match will be broadcast LIVE and EXCLUSIVE on SBS on Thursday 19th February at 9.30am AEST.*

A full match replay will be screened that evening at 10.00pm (All Centres)

Also, for those that can't access a TV, the game will be broadcast live on Radio (RADIO 2) from around the country. Radio Two will provide listeners right around the country the opportunity of hearing ball-by-ball commentary on the game from Caracas thanks Mr Soccer Radio himself Colin Turner.

The commentary will begin at 9.50am in Sydney, Melbourne and ACT, 9am in Queensland and 9.30am in Adelaide.

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BY DANIEL KUZIOW

Chesterfield has been boosted by the news they have secured Jamie McMaster's services on loan from Leeds United for another month.

The 21-year-old Australian has just completed a four-week spell at The Spireites, but will now be available for Roy McFarland for an additional month.

McMaster has found first-team appearances hard to come by at Elland Road, culminating in a loan move to Coventry City last season before this season's move to the R's.

"Jamie McMaster's had a month with us. I think he'd like to stay here for a further month. We are now firming that up with his particular club," McFarland told Skysports.

McMaster meanwhile is adamant that his current side have the ability to avoid relegation following the tea's strong showing at Peterborough.

The midfielder, scored one goal and made the other to catapult the Spireites out of the relegation zone for the first time in five months.

"That was a massive result in a massive game for us. If we play like that, I'm sure we'll be able to stay out of the relegation zone," McMaster ended.

★ ★ ★ ★

Birmingham manager Steve Bruce lavished praise on "immense" Stan Lazaridis after their mid-week win against Everton.

Laza scored a spectacular goal in the 3-0 victory at St Andrews and Bruce told BBC Sport: "It was a fantastic goal and Stan's contribution since we came into this division has been immense. He has been very good for 18 months."

Lazaridis ran half the length of the field to score and Bruce added: "He's done great. I am very pleased for the lad. He is a terrific professional."

Bruce insisted the Australian deserved the acclaim which followed for his consistent contribution to his side this season. Damien Johnson and Mikael Forssell also scored to increase the Blues' unbeaten record to six matches.

"I thought we played some excellent football and we were worthy winners.

"We've got five of our next seven games at home so we are entering a vital time.

"We've got on an unbeaten run and who knows what we can achieve if we stay injury-free and have a bit of luck. We'll just try and get as far as we can."

★ ★ ★ ★

Walsall's goalkeeping crisis deepened after Andy Petterson sustained a potentially career-threatening hand injury in the 1-1 draw with Crewe.

Petterson suffered a complex dislocation of a finger during a collision early in the second half.

He was in considerable pain but soldiered on because Walsall, with first-choice Jimmy Walker suspended and deputy Aaron Kerr and trainee Dean Coleman injured, had no 'keeper on the bench.

"Andy had dislocated a finger very badly," said boss Colin Lee.

"It's all over the shop and could be career-threatening. He did very well to stay on.

"I'd have brought him off if I could. At one stage it was that bad we were thinking of putting an out-field player in goal. He couldn't catch so had to punch everything."

"Andy did very well," Lee said. "I feel sorry for him. He's had a torrid time and it's been costly for us but I'm not going to slaughter him because he doesn't deserve that.

"He did fantastic until he made a wrong decision and, as we all know, when a goalkeeper makes a wrong decision it's costly."

★ ★ ★ ★

Mark Viduka recent return to form has earned the admiration of his team-mates.

The Aussie striker came in for special praise from both manager Eddie Gray and skipper Dominic Matteo, who believe Viduka will have a massive part to play in keeping The Whites in the Premiership.

Dylan McAllister: Norwegian club side Brann is currently vying for his signature.

Viduka gave an outstanding performance as Leeds thrashed Wolves 4-1, and scored his first Premier League goal since December right at the end. But it was his overall performance that impressed his captain.

"The big man is a breath of fresh air," Matteo told the club's official website, "His attitude is unbelievable at the moment.

"Since he's come back from Australia he's been really, really good to have around the place, he really wants us to stay up and he's really working hard in training.

"He's also been getting everyone keyed up for the game and he's been very important to us over the last week.

Manager Eddie Gray says having Viduka on form will be a huge boost to United's survival hopes.

"Mark has proved himself time after time as a goalscorer, if we can get the best out of him then staying in this league is easily achievable.

"I'm delighted he got a goal for himself, he worked tirelessly for the team and certainly deserved one."

★ ★ ★ ★

Norwegian club Brann are weighing up a move for Australian striker Dylan McAllister as they seek a replacement for Robbie Winters.

Winters is set to leave Brann at the end of the season to return to Scotland and Brann see McAllister as an ideal replacement.

McAllister has impressed on trial at Brann and club director Per-Ove Ludvigsen believes he will offer something different to the side.

"We hope to sign a contract with McAllister," Ludvigsen told skysports.com.

"He has proven to be a player with a good attitude and he is young.

"If this is sorted out are we sure he is a player that will develop. In addition to that he is a player that is not similar to what we have got."

Meanwhile Bristol City manager Danny Wilson has told skysports.com that he has not handed a trial to Australian goalkeeper Jordan Conti. Reports from Australia had suggested that the custodian, who plays for Australian club Stirling Lions, was trying his luck with the Ashton Gate outfit.

However, the former Barnsley and Sheffield Wednesday manager has denied having any Australian custodian currently training at the club.

"It's not true. I haven't got an Australian goalkeeper on trial," Wilson said.

★ ★ ★ ★

Newcastle United manager Sir Bobby Robson branded Lucas Neill's recent challenge on Craig Bellamy "atrocious" after the Blackburn Rovers defender clattered the Magpies' fit-again striker at Ewood Park.

Neill left Bellamy in a crumpled heap by the corner flag on the stroke of half-time having earlier failed to connect properly with a kick aimed at the Wales international.

Robson and his assistant John Carver were furious at the interval, confronting Neill as he trudged off the field.

"Craig Bellamy was the victim of an atrocious tackle at the corner flag, I've no doubt about it," said Sir Bobby. "How the referee didn't see it I don't know.

"I didn't think it was a right tackle and I was amazed the referee didn't do anything about it - the defender got him in the corner and went right through him and Craig has suffered from it.

"He cleaned Craig out. His knee has puffed up, he's limping - in fact he can hardly walk - and he must have done some slight ligament damage."

★ ★ ★ ★

Eddie Tesoro's young Wollongong Wolves youth squad are embarking on a major journey at the end of March when the South Coast club departs for France and England as part of their European Tour.

Aussie star Tim Cahill plants a kiss on Millwall skipper Dennis Wise during their Cup match against Telford United last week.

Tesoro has already organized friendly matches against Chelsea, West Ham, Tottenham and Blackburn Rovers before jetting off to France for the prestigious St Joseph International tournament in St Ettiene/Lyon.

Wollongong has been placed in a tough group with the likes of the Wolverhampton Wanderers, PSG, St-Ettiene, Deportivo La Coruna, Parma and Boavista.

The tournament kicks off in April with 19 players set to lead the representatives from Oceania against the world's best. Last season, the Wolves finished third but Tesoro is looking for bigger things this season.

"We are hoping to do one better than last year's tournament. I am taking players from our Under 18 winter team to also give them the experience as did our youth boys to continue the development they really deserve. There isn't a better experience than playing these types of quality games for these youngsters", ended Tesoro.

ABSW will keep the readers updated with their progress in Europe as our very own Otto Bader will accompany the squad as their media man whilst in France and England.

Ready for a world assault: The young Wolves side are departing for France and England at the end of March.

OFC CHAMPIONSHIP IS BACK

By Martin Zavan

After a four year absence the Oceania World Club Championships will return in 2005.

The first revamped tournament will be held in Tahiti in April next year, exact dates and the format of the tournament are yet to be decided..

The decision to bring back the Championships coincides with FIFA's recent revival of the World Club Championships also to return in 2005.

Oceania's last representative at the World Club Championships was South Melbourne who took on classy opposition such as Manchester United and Real Madrid during the 2000 tournament.

Wollongong Wolves defeated Tafea FC of Vanuatu in the last Oceania Club Championships, winning the right to participate in the World Club Championships to be held in Spain.

To the Wolves dismay, FIFA abruptly cancelled the championship due to a key sponsor going bankrupt, this in turn led to the decision to relaunch the tournament in 2005.

The OFC secretariat will now work with the Competitions Committee and the Federation Tahitienne de football to finalise dates. The format and schedule will depend on the number of entries.

However, it is expected the return of the Club Championship will see a good turnout similar to the last two tournaments in 2001 (Papua New Guinea) and in 1999 (Fiji).

The OFC national associations will now commence finding their representatives for this tournament when their respective national leagues kick off this year with some associations not knowing who their champions will be until 2005.

A Big cash incentive is up for grabs for the winner of the OFC qualifiers gaining entry to the World Club Championships – a bounty many Australian clubs would love to have.

The prestigious World Club Championship trophy which will be on show yet again.

MERRICK: Stay In NSL before Jetting to Europe

Youngsters who head to Europe before playing senior football in Australia are buying a ticket to oblivion, according to leading Victorian coach Ernie Merrick.

"I could give you a list as long as your arm of kids who were talked into going overseas straight after coming out of the Institute of Sport and have never been heard of again," Merrick said.

Merrick, the head coach of the Victorian Institute of Sport, was responding to claims by Socceroo legend Eddie Krncevic that Australia's best young prospects were better off going to Europe than staying to play senior club football in Australia.

"There is no evidence to support that at all," Merrick said. "History shows that players who have stayed on and had playing experience in the NSL are far better equipped. You can rattle them off from Mark Viduka, to Frank Farina, Marco Bresciano, Brett Emerton, Vince Grella, Mark Schwarzer, Kevin Muscat, Stan Lazaridis, to Zeljko Kalac.

"Compare that to Michael Ferrante, Joe Di Iorio, Adrian Madaschi, Scott McDonald. They've all failed overseas because they didn't play here long enough. (South Melbourne defender) Steve Laurie is another one I told you shouldn't be going overseas so early."

Laurie spent three years in the wilderness at West Ham's academy in England and went on loan to second division Peterborough, before returning to Australia this season. "I saw him recently and he told me I was right and he wished he'd stayed in Australia to get the right grounding," Merrick said.

Merrick said VIS scholarship holders Kristian Sarkies and Adrian Leijer had the right idea.

Sarkies, 17, has broken into South's senior team, looks set to be named the rookie of the year and has committed to play two more seasons in Australia.

Source – AAP

VIS head-coach believes that youngsters should stay in the NSL for a few years before jetting off overseas.

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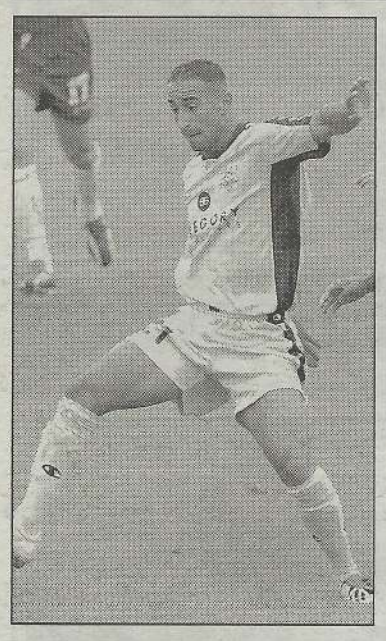
Parramatta Duo Fly the Flag for NSL



Meet NSL Socceroos Ahmad Elrich (Left) & Simon Colosimo (Right)

By Peter Damalas

Parramatta Power duo Ahmad Elrich and Simon Colosimo, the two NSL players in the twenty man Socceroo squad to take on Venezuela, agree that more home based players are capable of representing Australia at the senior level.

After national coach Frank Farina announced his squad for the important friendly in Caracas (Wednesday morning AEST), the names Elrich and Colosimo would have come as a surprise to a few people.

But those who have witnessed the performances of the two players for their club side in this season's national league would have seen two young men who have matured and developed different facets of their game.

Right winger, Ahmad Elrich, 22, has long been considered to be a player of raw pace since he debuted in 1999. He now has over 100 national league appearances to his name, and he is known as much for his bursts of speed as for his close control, ability to find the gaps in the opposition defence with his passing, and above all, his finishing.

His contribution to the Australian Under 23 team in the January Olympic Games qualifiers was outstanding, and certainly put him in the frame for the senior team.

Elrich was one of the standout performers in the round robin phase of the competition, but two moments during the play-off with New Zealand convinced Farina of his worth to the Socceroo squad.

In the first leg, the All Whites did their utmost to frustrate Australia's wide men, and Elrich did not receive enough of the ball.

In the final ten minutes however, when Elrich was set up by Nick Carle, he proved effective and deadly as he buried the ball in the back of the net from a difficult angle-perhaps the most important goal of his career.

Then, in the second leg, with Australia a goal down and under pressure from the rejuvenated opposition, Elrich fed substitute Ryan Griffiths with a defence splitting cross field pass- perhaps the most important assist of his career.

He considers this match in Caracas to be the start of the 2006 World Cup qualifying campaign.

"I think Frank Farina is trying to bring some of the Olyroos together with the older players to get a good mix of youth and experience for the World Cup. He is definitely on the lookout.

"For me, this shows that all the hard work has paid off. When I was younger I always wanted to play for the Socceroos. This is a great buzz, I can't wait to meet all the boys, to train with them and learn from them," Elrich said.

Elrich's promise and talent has brought him into the spotlight this year, and he is set to play an important role in Athens in August, and beyond.

"People doubted us [before the Olympic Games qualifiers] but we believed in ourselves. Qualifying for the Olympic Games is a great feeling, unbelievable," he said.

For 2003 Marston Medal winner, Simon Colosimo, the call-up represents another opportunity to revive his international career, which seemed a certainty in 1999 before a crude tackle from Manchester United's Andy Cole threatened to derail his footballing prospects.

"I'm feeling ecstatic and also anxious to get another crack at [the national team], it's been a while," he said.

When asked if he hoped to be play a part in the match, Colosimo replied: "I've always got aspirations to play. I think if you go just to make up the numbers, you probably shouldn't be there. Having said that, it's a great honour to be in the squad."

So, should there be more NSL players in the Socceroo set-up?

"Why not?," he says. "It comes down to Frank Farina- he watches many games in Australia and he sees the guys that are playing week in, week out. And there are some excellent players in the Olyroo squad," he said.

The 25 year old has, like Elrich, developed as an intelligent footballer who is capable of playing in different positions. He began his career as a defender, on the right and in the centre, but has found his niche in the centre of the park, dictating play with his tackling, positional sense and expansive distribution.

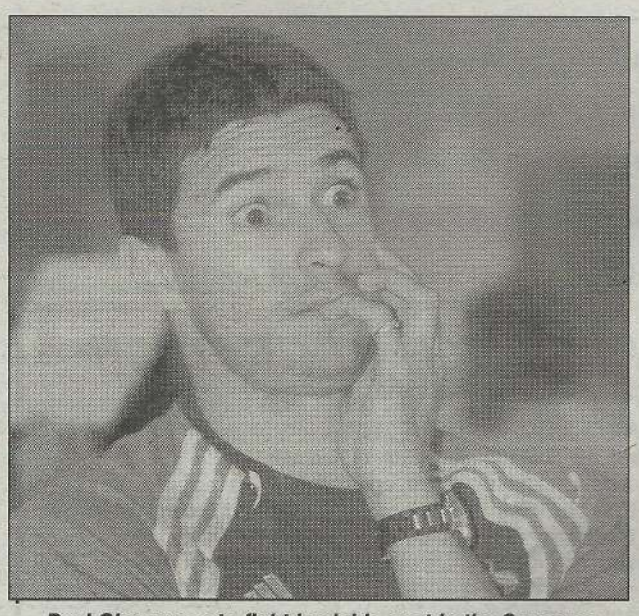
He also brings to the squad a previous experience in Venezuela, as he toured while at the Australian Institute of Sport. His knowledge of South American football may push his case for inclusion at some stage of the friendly.

Regular football at the national level has, to a large extent, proved beneficial for the Parramatta duo, who have had the time to develop a well rounded game, in the same way Brett Emerton profited from his NSL experience before moving abroad.

The 'full strength Socceroo team' has traditionally been the domain of the Australians playing overseas.

This selection may indicate that home based players are beginning to be recognised once again for their efforts. It appears that regular football at home may be just as valuable as the European adventure.

FARINA'S ROO AGENDA



Paul Okon vows to fight back his spot in the Socceroo squad.

By Martin Zavan

On the eve of the Socceroos historic clash with Venezuela seasoned Aussie supporters are left wondering if the game that is supposedly in preparation for the 2006 World Cup qualifiers is being wasted due to the selection of several players who will not be part of the qualifying campaign in 2005.

It seems that Farina is feeling the pressure placed on him by ASA through their demands that he must select a full strength squad for every Socceroo's fixture.

While this policy does have some merit it sees that excellent young players are often neglected by the national squad which desperately needs to form a key base of players from which to build the foundations to a successful World Cup qualifying campaign.

Veteran players such as Stan Lazaridis, Tony Popovic and Tony Vidmar have served the Socceroos well over the years however as the cliché goes, they are not getting any younger and there seems to be several players who could make the next step up from the Olyroos to the Socceroos.

While the problem of ageing players is not limited to defence, it seems to be in this area that Australia is most reliant on its older, more experienced players.

Olyroo's skipper Ljubo Milicevic had an excellent Olympic qualifying campaign and is a regular starter at his Swiss first division club FC Thun. There is also Jade North who was probably the most consistent player throughout the Olyroos qualification process and also had the largest amount of game time.

At only 22 years of age he is already a key player for NSL champions Perth Glory and obviously has a long career ahead of him.

And there are many other promising young talents such as Nottingham Forest's David Tarka and Ahmad Elrich, the latter being the only new face in the Socceroo's squad after a very successful Olympic qualifying campaign in which he netted four goals in six games.

Part of the reason for Farina's choices may be the uncertainty regarding his own job. It is hard to imagine that ASA would axe Farina before the World Cup qualifiers begin but should the Socceroos fail to qualify for a second time under Farina, his national career would without doubt be over.

Another highly contentious issue is that of who will take on the captaincy of the Socceroos. Former captain Paul Okon has finally been omitted from the Socceroos after his career fell into a rapid state of decline after being sold by Leeds.

Rangers Captain Craig Moore is the favourite to replace Okon. He is very experienced in playing in big matches, has plenty of exposure with he Socceroos and at 28 years of age, one would think that he would still be with the Socceroos in 2006.

Other possibilities include Mark Schwarzer who has been the clear first choice keeper for the last two years. He is also consistently excellent at his club Middlesbrough with whom he will take part in the Carling Cup Final later this month.

A notable exclusion from the side was Perugia's Zeljko Kalac. Despite his clubs poor form, Kalac has not had a bad season and his absence from the squad is most likely due to a hamstring injury which has been giving him some trouble as of late.

Harry Kewell surprised many people by declaring himself available for the Venezuela game and some punters may have been even more surprised when he was selected by Frank Farina. Although Kewell's comments have enraged many Australian soccer fans it is without doubt that the Socceroos are a better team with Kewell.

Parramatta Power team mates Simon Colosimo and Ahmad Elrich were also included in the Socceroos squad, this is perhaps the first time NSL players have been selected for matches against European or South American opposition since Steve Horvat's inclusion in the Socceroo squad that lost to Uruguay on aggregate and failed to qualify for the 2002 World Cup. Korea/Japan.

The new ASA board must be commended on their achievements so far and organising a friendly so early in the year and another one in London against South Africa on 31st March.

However they must continue to organise games for Australia against quality European and more importantly South American nations that we are likely to encounter on route to the World Cup.

RUDAN'S BACK IN BUSINESS

One of the NSL's most deadliest defenders: Sydney United's Mark Rudan.

By Luke Doherty

Sydney United defender Mark Rudan is back. Back into a top line of form.

The hunger and ambition is back and most importantly back from Germany.

Rudan left the NSL in 2000 for Aachen in the German second division before going onto China – but it was in Germany that the most life changing experience of his career happened.

After settling in to a new country and a new club, it looked as though Rudan was going to have a crack at a new life – The life of a European footballer.

From there it all went wrong and none of the situation was his fault.

He was lying in bed in his home in the early hours of the morning. 6am is early for house calls.

Rudan opened the front door to see a couple of German police officers.

From there he was hauled into an Aachen jail – where he spent the next week in a cell for 23 hours a day.

He was an innocent bystander in a situation he wasn't controlling.

It was all part of a botched transfer from Northern Spirit to Aachen – and complications shouldn't have happened because Rudan was a free agent.

"The transfer went all wrong, there was never meant to be a transfer because I was a free player."

"They tried to make money out of me."

"Looking at it now I had the lawyer telling me to keep my mouth shut but I didn't have anything to be quiet about."

"The court said I was going to jail because I wasn't talking but I was being told not to talk."

It was in jail that Rudan met his saviour though. A man who had been convicted of tax fraud heard about the injustice being done to the big Aussie defender and came to the rescue.

The man, who came to be a friend told Rudan how to fix his situation so that he was being given a fair deal and three days later he was out.

"In the end I had 10-12 lawyers wanting to help me out because they had all heard about it."

Life is rosier now though and Rudan is enjoying not only the birth of his first child – a little boy named Luka but the best form of his career.

The 28 year old defender is known as the "great wall of Edensor" to United fans and has been a revelation for United since returning from China at the end of last season.

It's been a mixed year for United. They currently sit 7th on the table with just seven wins from their 20 games.

Marconi sit in 6th place three points ahead of United and a finals berth is a real possibility.

United will have to ditch the inconsistency however if they want to put a firm hand on the last finals spot. In their last four games they play Perth twice, Marconi and the Melbourne Knights.

Marconi has it equally tough. Apart from United – Marconi play South Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth in the last four rounds – all teams that are in the top six.

STATE OF ORIGIN – SOCCER STYLE

By Luke Doherty

A sense of state rivalry could enter Australia's soccer culture next season with the possibility of a NSW Vs Queensland state of origin type series on the calendar.

The clash could be played over a three match home and away series similar to the national rugby league set up.

Players would have to be born or have played the majority of their junior football in that state to be eligible to play for them.

Queensland Soccer CEO David Kay says that with the right promotion the event could be a huge success.

"We had a CEO's meeting in Sydney last weekend and we have talked about something like this." Kay said.

"We have thought about having a tournament with South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland in June this year."

Last year's rugby league - state of origin series saw huge crowds at Sydney's Telstra stadium and Brisbane's Suncorp stadium and Kay says that in time soccer could be reaping the same lucrative benefits that rugby league is.

"The state federations are keen to get something together."

"We've spoken at a board level and the New South Wales versus Queensland games don't get the support that they deserve but we are definitely keen to get the state of origin games going."

"I think NSW would be receptive towards it as well."

Sydney United defender Mark Rudan, who was born and bred in NSW was also is in favour of the idea.

"It will take a bit of time but most players would be in favour of it," Rudan said.

"But it definitely should happen. There is plenty of time to do it during the season and I know the players would love to do it given the right marketing."

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Marconi Stallions vs South Melbourne

MARCONI STALLIONS

at the Marconi Stadium

Tuesday February 17

Main Game Kick-Off 7pm

Gates Open 6pm

Marconi Stadium

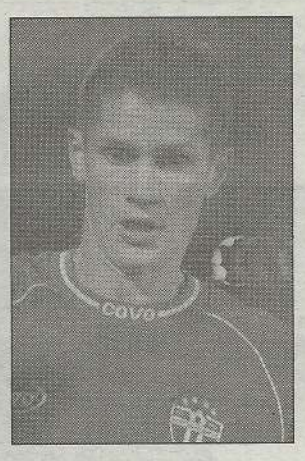
SOUTH MELBOURNE S.C. EST 1959

Jean Paul De Marigny (Manager)

Michael Turnbull

Angelo Costanzo

Con Boutsianis



Vaughan Coveny

Stuart Munro (Manager)

Proudly Sponsored By **BRESCIA FURNITURE**

National Soccer League

Football Kingz 2
South Melbourne 0

The Football Kingz confronted the ghost of a recent thrashing by South Melbourne months ago by beating the Australian team 2-0 in Auckland last Saturday afternoon showcasing the shock result of this weekend's NSL matches.

Usually propping up the bottom of the National Soccer League, the Kingz upset the favourites who went into the match with the confidence of knowing that last time these two teams met, it was a 6-0 trouncing.

It was the Kiwi side's third victory of the season and comes with just two games left in the season.

Noah Hickey and Harry Ngata scored the goals for the home side, who held a 1-0 lead at halftime.

The visitors had plenty to play for with a favourable playoff spot up for grabs.

With so many former Kingz club players now with South Melbourne, it was very much a case of the Kingz of old against the 2004 version. Both sides had early opportunities, but the defence held inside the box and neither keeper was really troubled.

The Kingz got off to a sharp start, and Mauro Donoso fired a shot from long range that only just cleared the bar in the best opportunity of the opening 12 minutes.

In the 19th minute, Harry Ngata beat the defenders to a free kick inside South Melbourne's penalty area, drawing out the goalkeeper and providing Noah Hickey with a plum ball to tap in for a 1-0 lead, which they held through the interval.

It had been a promising first 20 minutes for the Kingz, who were playing with a renewed level of intensity.

With the new Eastern Stand being constructed in the background at Ericsson Stadium, the ground looked particularly empty, the faithful few aside.

Con Boutsianis fired a shot into the Kingz goal mouth in the 38th minute that had Michael Utting diving to make the save and hold the home side's one goal lead.

As the half came to an end, Mark Burton found a ball sail just over his head in a scoring position.

Kingz goal poacher Harry Ngata bagged a surprise goal for the Kiwi side in their shock two-nil win over South Melbourne last weekend.

It had a been a first half that the home side had dominated.

The Kingz got another chance in the 53rd minute when Hickey got past the South Melbourne defenders with his speed but could not find Ngata in front.

Moments later though, Ngata got his opportunity with a header into the back of the net off a corner and the Kingz doubled their lead.

Young promising Kiwi star Craig Wylie showed plenty of skill with the ball as he danced and weaved his way into the box and all but beat the keeper.

All of the attack was centred at the Kingz' end and despite their placing on the NSL ladder, South Melbourne were never really in the hunt.

South Melbourne under coach Stuart Munro will now face and up-hill battle in catching second spot and ideally a second chance in the NSL finals after this devastating loss to the Kingz.

Munro was disappointed at the conclusion of the match but vowed that the Blues are still in the hunt and that they will be there come NSL Finals series better than ever.

For the Kingz, it was a win that the Kiwis will long remember for a long time after the side recorded its worst results ever in the NSL this season.

Source – AAP

Urawa Red Diamonds commence pre-season camp in Adelaide

The Urawa Red Diamonds arrived in Adelaide last Friday to commence their two-week pre-season camp.

The Reds are the most popular team in the J-League, averaging crowds of over 26,000 to their home matches - the highest of any club in the J-League.

The club are a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mitsubishi Motors - thus the Red Diamonds tag.

The club have recently appointed former German International Guido Buchwald as their senior coach for 2004. Buchwald played in Germany's World Cup campaigns of 1990 and 1994 representing his country in a total of 76 games - 10 World Cup appearances and a member of the victorious German team at the 1990 World Cup in Rome.

The club also boasts many international stars, including Brazilian Striker Emerson. Ned Zelic was a member of the Reds last year, but this year will return to the German Bundesliga.

With a travelling party of 55 Players, Officials, Trainers, Doctors and Staff, this is the largest group to travel to Adelaide for a training camp.

The team will spend 14 rigorous days in Adelaide preparing for the 2004 J-League season. They will train twice daily at Hindmarsh Stadium and will play four matches (see schedule below).

Many J-League Clubs have held camps in Adelaide over the past nine years - but none with a higher profile than the Urawa Red Diamonds, who are now about to embark on their third Adelaide camp (previous camps were in 1995 and 1996).

Match schedule is as follows: Wednesday Feb 18: Adelaide Galaxy - Adults $5. Children Under 16 FREE Sunday Feb 22: Adelaide United - Adults $6. Concession $4. Children Under 16 FREE. Adelaide United Season Ticket Holders Admitted FREE.

Wednesday Feb 25: SA State Team - Curtain Raiser to Adelaide United v Parramatta Power match. (Normal AUFC admission prices apply).

For the match against Adelaide United, on Sunday February 22nd, one lucky patron will win a return trip to Japan compliments of JAL Airlines including Adelaide - Sydney, compliments of Bunnik Travel, and a VIP Pass to a Red Diamonds match!!

Wollongong Wolves 0
Adelaide United 1

By Otto Bader

On Friday night at WIN Stadium Wollongong Wolves' inability to finish in front of goal failing to capitalize on their few chances cost them one or perhaps with luck all three points.

It must be said that Adelaide had double the opportunities in the first half but managed somehow to butcher all of them. No wonder coach John Kosmina and assistant Aurelio Vidmar spoke of lack of composure when having the chance to place the ball into the net. They could have easily scored a dozen goals and that is not exaggerated however found their master in Wolves keeper Andrew Crews and the woodwork. However a mistake by Crews gave Adelaide the win in the 80th minute when he misjudged a simple cross after a corner, allowed the ball to drop and a scramble near the goal line saw Michael Brooks – a former Wollongong player, slot the ball into the net. A real disaster for the Wolves defence which at that point looked quite solid.

In front of a crowd of 3010 the Wolves started off well but lost their way somewhat in the final 20 minutes of the first half.

Wolves custodian Andrew Crews was excellent under the sticks.

Adelaide had several opportunities, hit the upright, failed to beat the keeper twice in excellent positions, strayed the ball wide and instead of taking a handy lead never had anything to show for at the break.

Wollongong had a great opening when new boy Nick Sabljak had a free shot only to see his six yard strike saved brilliantly by Adelaide keeper David Scarsella. The former Knights player also executed a fine free kick from about 20 metres out which was tipped over the bar by the visitor's keeper.

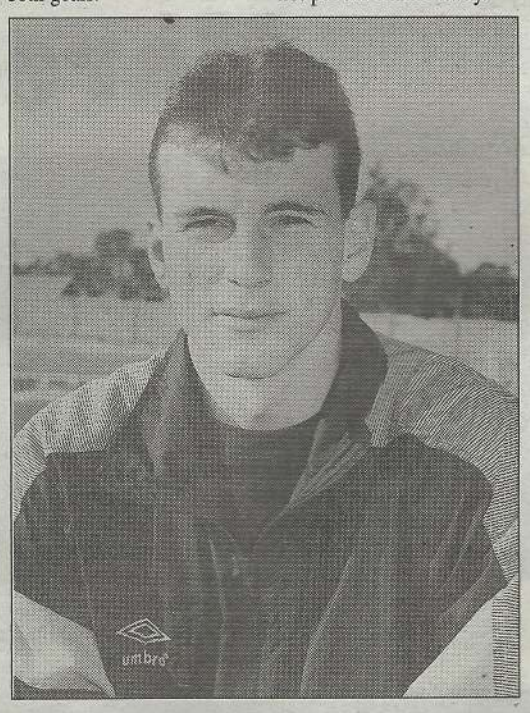
The only other chance for the Wolves came from Stuart Young with a header well over the top of the crossbar.

Compared with Adelaide's opportunities the score should have favoured the visitors at the break.

Coach John Turner admitted in the first half towards the later part his charges lost their way a bit and it needed a correction to tighten things up in the second half.

Finishing in the first half was woeful on both sides however an entertaining game kept the fans interested with action in front of both goals.

Adelaide started well in the second part with a corner in the 50th minute and a confusing goal mouth scramble in front of the amused Wolves keeper Crews who kept the ball out somehow with the help of his defenders, it was had to believe that Adelaide did not put the chance away.



Former Wolves striker Michael Brooks put home his second goal for Adelaide in their one-nil win at WIN Stadium last week.

The Wolves were not allowed to create much due to the very physical marking of the visitors and only in the final few minutes two fine headers from Wolves striker Chimaobi Nwaogazi could have had better results. In extra time Stuart Young took a free kick right in front of the visitor's goal around 25 metres out, the ball hit the wall and the rebound shot just went wide.

Post-match, Wolves coach John Turner praised his charges for trying hard with no luck on their side, a penalty claim early in the 3rd minute when Shane Lyons was brought down in the box was waved away, but said the visitors did create many more opportunities. He noted his playmaker from past games Nahuel Arrarte was sorely missed.

Adelaide's Aurelio Vidmar thought the team played rather sloppy in a hard struggle, expected in Wollongong and had a bit of luck to come away with a scrappy goal, enough to take the points. He complained his team missed a lot of openings in the first half and came under pressure in the later part of the game.

National Soccer League

Perth Glory 2
Newcastle United 0

Back to his defensive best: Glory's Matthew Bingley was a stand-out in the Perth defence.

By Richard Kreider

Perth Glory was assured of a second-chance spot for the 2003-04 National Soccer League championship last Saturday and that was even before the ball had left the centre-circle in their clash with Newcastle United.

It was the leagues' doormats, Football Kingz who paved the way for the defending champions to secure a top-two placing, after the New Zealand club stunned third placed South Melbourne with only their third win of the season.

Nevertheless, Glory avenged their first round loss to the Newcastle side with a 2-0 victory, albeit an uneventful one, to preserve an eight-point buffer on second placed Parramatta Power, with three games remaining before the play-offs.

Interestingly, it is the third consecutive 2-0 win for the Perth club and the third 2-0 defeat for United.

Since the November loss in Newcastle, the Perth club have notched up ten victories and one draw.

Goalkeeper Jason Petkovic must have forgotten what it feels like to concede a goal, because apart from his drink bottle, he hasn't had to pick anything out of his net in over 360 minutes of game time.

Yet despite all this achievement, Glory gaffer Mich d'Avray still had to defend his sides' less than convincing performance with the local media.

"There are a lot of clubs who would like to swap places with us," he said. "Tonight we didn't create as many chances as we have in previous games but at this stage of the season it's just important to win."

"You have got to accept that of the last eleven games, eight have been at home where some games you win playing well, and some not so well."

Even d'Avray's friend and Newcastle coach, Ian Crook, came to his defence, and did it firmly. "I come into this room tonight and it's as though your team got beat," he said.

"You have to play the game at a high level to appreciate what they have achieved. At the end of the day, they play under intense pressure every week and they perform. They've done it over the last three years now," said Crook.

"I believe it should be Parramatta in their position. They have got all the so-called top names, but each week, your lot keep going out and producing the goods," said the former Norwich City and Tottenham Hotspur midfielder who turned 41 last month.

"This is the game our boys look forward to, but we are not the only ones. Your Adelaide's, your Wollongong's all come here wanting to play well."

"They (Glory) have my utmost respect," he said.

The game began untidily and devoid of vigour, but it must be a challenge motivating a Glory side who are streets ahead of their opposition and close to securing a third Premiership. Combine that with the scarce goalscoring capabilities of the Newcastle team, who have found the net just twice in their last 8 outings and you have the building blocks for a bland contest.

But while both sides struggled for governance, there were some individual performances worthy of acclaim, especially from the visitors.

United midfielder Stuart Musialik and defender Michael Prentice showed plenty of proof that they are more than capable at this level of Australian soccer.

The industrious Scott Thomas, flank forward Ryan Griffiths and regular skipper Robbie Middleby proved their nuisance value, while Josh Mitchell and Thomas Libbesson gave equal levels of commitment.

"There isn't too many times when you come away from a place and not disappointed at losing 2-nil," said Crook. "With the side that we had, I am delighted with the effort."

However, Perth gave plenty of indication it could lift to the next level when pressed. Glory's defence was its usual miserly self while the midfield and forward lines did enough without any overexertion.

After a clever Bobby Despotovski turn and strike was easily grabbed by Tom Willis in the sixth minute, Middleby came perilously close five minutes later at the other end with a long-range strike which thumped into Petkovics' crossbar.

Tom Pondlejak replied after a quarter of an hours play with a one-on-one duel with the Newcastle 'keeper but the skilful midfielder clipped his shot wide of the far upright.

Not to be outdone, Libbesson was presented with a similar situation but Petkovic left his line in an instant to block the youngster's shot.

Perth broke the deadlock after 27 minutes through that man Damian Mori when a first-class cross by Pondeljak was glanced with deadly accuracy from 8 metres past the right glove of Willis.

A second goal went begging literally seconds later but Willis redeemed himself with a sharp save on a low missile from Pondeljak.

Former Glory defender Craig Deans was made match captain for the visitors and was made to earn his pay with Perth's lethal front line always breathing down his neck.

The second goal came five minutes from full-time through substitute Adrian Caceres with virtually his first touch. Man of the match Despotovski noticed the skilful striker completely unmarked on Newcastle's right and pushed the ball to him accordingly. Caceres, who turned 22 last month, wasted little time in firing the ball into the roof of the net for his fourth goal of the season, to give the 8,678 crowd something to talk about on their way home.

Despite the Premiership being virtually assured, d'Avray is adamant he won't rest any players until it is definitely certain.

"I'd like to finish top before we make some changes," he said.

Marconi Stallions 3
Sydney United 0

Marconi just about put an end to Sydney United's top six hope on Saturday night with a 3-0 victory at Marconi Stadium. For United it was a repeat of what has occurred all year, their failure to convert early chances came back to bite them.

In the 3rd minute Labinot Haliti, just back from injury, beat Simon Bell and passed it to Brendan Santalab in traffic in the area. Santalab did very well to turn it back into the path of Franco Parisi but he miss hit the ball and it went straight to Michael Turnbull in the Marconi goal. Three minutes later good lead up work from Matthew Langdon saw Parisi have a shot from insitle the box but this time the ball went well wide of the target. They were two misses the visitors could not afford. It was also Langdon's last contribution as only minutes later he damaged his ankle when collected by an opponent and he was replaced by Liam Austin. Langdon looks like he could be out for the remainder of the season.

United's Damon Collina out-jumps Marconi's Jeromy Harris for the ball during last week's Sydney derby encounter.

United really dominated the first twenty minutes but like on Wednesday night

Marconi sat back and took it all in. The visitors were playing some good attacking football until the tide turn in the 21st minute. Nick Carle's freekick on the right of the area was headed goalwards by Alex Brosque who turned to see his flick just go wide of the far post. Two minutes later Simon Bell ran through into the area but totally miss-kicked his shot. As if to epitomize the difference in luck for the two teams, Bell's poor effort fell into the path of Alex Brosque in the area and with his left foot he emphatically smashed the ball home.

Marconi had hit a real purple patch and played some entertaining football in this ten minute spell. Jeromy Harris did some good work down the right flank and played it to Alex Brosque on the edge of the area in the 27th minute. Brosque played it back to Socceroo Nick Carle who fired it over the bar.

The game then fell in quality as both teams wrestled for possession and field position until just before half time. In the 44th minute Nick Carle had fired another warning shot as he turned and shot only for the ball to go wide. Then in the last play of the half Carle put in a corner to the far post where it came off Michael Thwaite's body and fell to the near post for Jeromy Harris to slot home.

A minute after the break Luke Casserley almost scored but blasted the ball wide after great lead up work from Harris and Brosque.

In the 64th minute controversy struck the match as Sydney United looked to have got on the scoreboard. Mark Rudan headed goalwards only for Michael Turnbull to block it brilliantly. The ball fell to Damon Collina though and he fired it home. However the linesman adjudged Collina to be offside when Rudan had headed the ball originally and thus the goal was not given. United were extremely upset about this decision and it was to get even more costly one minute later. The ball had been kicked up field where Marconi were awarded a free kick. Chad Gibson lined up behind the ball 25 metres from goal and fired it home, his second goal from free kicks in three matches. It was a fantastic effort as he went to the near post of Liam Reddy.

Sydney United did not give up and finished well. Brendan Santalab went down in the area fifteen minutes from time but the small penalty appeals were waved away. Substitute Mark Beldham tripped over the ball when in the area unmarked three minutes later. David Huxley found himself at the near post with the ball but could only hit the post with his shot in the 80th minute. Then in the 84th minute Santalab turned in the area but his shot went well over the bar. After the match Grant Lee just about conceded his teams chances of making the six were over. He said the lack of goals early on had really frustrated his team. Jean Paul De Marigny was happy with his side's overall performance and was especially happy at how they play as a unit to make sure oppositions can not break them down.

Marconi Grabs Cash, Cup and Points

(Continued from front page)

The unexpected dead-heat between these two sterling Marconi players provoked sponsoring businessman Mr Dino Seraglio to immediately double the $1,000 cash award.

Over the two games played by these two great sides the final point scorers were:

1 - Damon Collina (Sydney United)
1 – Labinot Haliti (Sydney United)
2 – Mark Rudan (Sydney United)
2 - Chad Gibson (Marconi)
3 - Nicky Carle (Marconi)
3 – Joe Spiteri (Marconi)

Marconi having played five deferred matches due to the Olympic qualifiers has now amassed 13 precious League points from a possible 15.

Marconi tonight (Tuesday) plays its last home match against Stuart Munro's visiting South Melbourne with kick-off being 7pm.

Marconi President Tony Campolongo sponsor Terry Leckie, captain Brad Maloney ABSW Journalist John Economos sponsor Mr Dino Seraglio.

National Soccer League

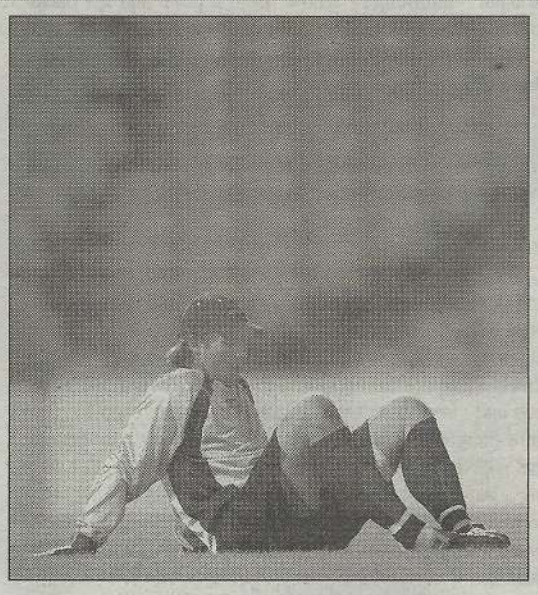
Northern Spirit 0
Parramatta Power 1

Saso Petrovski ensured Parramatta Power remained well-placed for their run into the NSL championship series, maintaining the coveted second spot with a 1-0 win against Northern Spirit at Pittwater Park last Sunday evening.

Power moved eight points clear of third-placed Adelaide United and one more point from their final two games should be enough, considering the huge goal difference advantage they have over United.

The two teams clash on Wednesday week in Adelaide, which was their postponed game from Round 2.

Parramatta went into this game without two of their stars - Ahmad Elrich and Simon Colosimo - and although the Power had the better of the game, they did make hard work of it.



A dejected Paul Henderson looks on after conceding a goal against the Power.

The 11th-placed Spirit - whose chances of a series berth were extinguished several rounds ago - defended robustly but failed to keep the sheet clean or score a goal.

Petrovski, who has been warming the bench in the past few weeks due to the good form of Fernando Rech, made the most of his return by heading home the winner for the Power in the 23rd minute.

The goal came from an outswinging corner by Pantelis on the left and Petrovski met it with a powerful header that gave Spirit keeper Paul Henderson no chance.

Henderson though did his bit to keep his side in the game, making three outstanding saves.

The first came five minutes before the break, when Ante Milicic's looping shot saw Henderson dive backwards and tip the ball over the crossbar.

Shortly after half time, he pushed a vicious shot from Petrovski on the turn around the post for a corner at full stretch and then five minutes before full time he denied Mark Bridge his first NSL goal, diving at full stretch to stop the young Power striker's header.

Power all the way: Sasho Petrovski celebrating the game's only goal against the Spirit.

Spirit almost stole a point at the finish when a corner fell to Ian Ferguson outside the box and his volley looked goalbound until Matt Thompson managed to clear off his line.

Spirit pushed through towards the business end of the match and almost stole a point at the finish when a corner fell to Ian Ferguson outside the box and his volley looked goalbound until Matt Thompson managed to clear off his line.

Parramatta had another good chance with Michael Beauchamp's ball heading directly for an open goal, only for it to be deflected by Spirit midfielder Vuko Tomasevic.

"I am absolutely ecstatic with the result in what was fairly trying conditions," said Power coach Nick Theodorakopoulos after the match.

"Our defensive performance especially in the second half was very good and that should give the players a bit of confidence going into the final few games before the finals series.

"The win today now means we only need one more point to secure second spot and the players are all looking forward to the local derby next Friday night against Sydney Olympic to achieve that point.

Melbourne Knights 2
Brisbane Strikers 0

By Alan Clark

Melbourne Knights ensured its season would end with a bang rather than a whimper with a solid two-nil win over Finals contenders Brisbane Strikers at Somers Street on Sunday evening.

Rodrigo Vargas headed Knights into the lead just before the half-hour. Serkan Oksuz applied the killer blow two minutes from time as the Strikers committed resources to the attack in an effort to equalise.

But perhaps the greatest blow to the Strikers on the night was when Karl Dodd - a key player at the heart of the Strikers' defence - was stetchered off with an injury to his right knee just after the hour.

"I was just behind the incident," said Strikers' player-coach Stuart McLaren. "It was just one of those awkward moments where his body has gone one way and he's gone to turn the other way."

Feel the strain: Rodrigo Vargas of the Knights is challenged by Luke Morley and Josh McLoughlan of the Strikers.

Dodd had a full knee reconstruction a year ago.

"It's (only) the second home win of the season," said a delighted Knights' coach Ian Dobson after the game. "But we thoroughly deserved to win the game."

"We weren't really allowed to settle," said McLaren. "Every time the ball dropped, it seemed to be Knights' players that were getting there first."

"Knights started very brightly, and once you're in that rythmn it's (easy) to maintain," he said.

Royce Brownlie was making some good runs during the half, and from one of his earliest, almost crafted an opener. Adrian Leijer had attempted a clearance as Brownlie approached only to see the ball crash off the Strikers' front-man and run handily for his follow-up chase. Tommi Tomich did well to close down the angle and make an effective block which Steve Pantelidis cleared.

Brownlie was to repeat this charging run throughout the first half, but Leijer and Pantelidis were quick to minimise the danger by crowding him out and marshalling him away from the danger area.

Knights too created some decent chances in an enterprising first period. Oksuz found space behind McLaren down the left on a number of occasions without being able to play the telling ball afterwards. But this was a Knights which was playing - as last week - with significantly more energy and commitment than was displayed a fortnight earlier in the Melbourne derby, and which deserved more than the small crowd in attendance to witness.

Once again, there was little at stake for Knights, playing - as they are - just to conclude their tenure as a national league club. However,although Knights cannot hope for Finals action this year despite its proud history as a contender during its NSL stint, Knights can still make an uncomfortable opponent for teams which do. Brisbane Strikers will now have some work to do to ensure its ability to play beyond February.

Although Knights' opening goal came from a corner, when Rodrigo Vargas headed in at the far post from his brother's well-flighted ball, its genesis was in a quickly taken free-kick by Leijer.

Leijer had spotted the potential of Ante Pelikan's run and sent him free before the Strikers' defence had regained their positions. As Pelikan was in the act of shooting, a last-ditch tackle conceded the corner which - at the time - seemed a less dangerous option. The Vargas brothers put paid to that thought.

The game opened up in the last half-hour. Knights was seeking the comfort of a second, and Strikers the goal that would bring them back into the contest.

"We had a chat at half-time, and we came out a bit more determined in the second-half," said McLaren. "But when you start a game a little below your best it's hard to drag yourself up to a higher level."

Pelikan for the Knights, and Josh McLoughlin and Warren Moon for the Strikers all had good chances as the game entered its final phase.

Pelikan's shot from 14 metres was blocked by Scott Higgins who had an effective game in goal for the Strikers. McLoughlin's header at the far-post from a Louis Brain corner almost reprised the Knights' goal, but instead flashed over the bar. And Moon, who had come on for Dodd but was played in a more advanced position, put a shot wide when he had ample time right in front but outside the penalty-area.

These misses were to prove costly as Knights extended the lead in the final minutes. A storming run up the middle was made by Pelikan with Henry Fa'arodo in support to his right, and Oksuz to his left. Playing a quick one-two with Fa'arodo, Pelikan had space to shoot. Higgins did well to block, but the ball fell neatly for Oksuz to sweep home.

Some standard protests were made by the Strikers' defence, claiming offside, but McLaren dismissed any objection in his post-match comments. "Clutching at straws," was his direct response. "I'd pushed up the park, and we got caught on the break a bit. It's the risk you take."

"We had pace coming off the bench," said Dobson. "It makes it quite dangerous, particularly when teams are pushing to equalise."

Oksuz had another chance in added-time after Fa'arodo sent a square all across the face of goal but the youngster's side-foot shot went just wide.

BYE - SYDNEY OLYMPIC

SOCCERWOMAN by Janene Mar

MATILDAS IN ACTION TOMORROW

Steer yourself to QEII Stadium in Brisbane this week and cheer on the Matildas as they take on a quality lineup to kick off what promises to be a big year.

At the conclusion of this tournament, the Aussies jet straight off to Fiji where they are expected to secure their Olympic Games berth at the Oceania Olympic Qualifiers. And Brisbane may well be the last chance you get to see them first-hand before Athens 2004.

Adrian Santrac: Matildas coach is ready for the task at hand at the Australia Cup.

Each of the matches serves up an intriguing contest for the Matildas' new-look combination which includes five rookies.

New Zealand are never an easy opponent, armed with all the passion that goes with such a trans-Tasman battle. This time however, they will be more fired up than ever, not only to beat their old foes, but as much to prove to their very own administrators that they have been served a rough deal with withdrawal from the Oceania Olympic Qualifiers.

North Korea, current Asian champions, want to prove more than just hold a high spot on the FIFA rankings by making their mark in a world event, that goal now being the 2004 Olympics following what they regarded a disappointing 2003 Women's World Cup.

China, although travelling with a young side, have the pedigree and professional structure behind them and won't be satisfied not to come away with top class results. After an usually poor (by their lofty standards) World Cup performance last year, there is much to be done before the 2007 World Cup and the 2008 Olympics, both of which China is to host.

As for our Matildas, the goal remains for them to win a match at a world event (World Cup or Olympic Games), and the experience gained during this Australia Cup will hopefully work towards Australia achieving that goal in Athens 2004.

SKIPPER AND VICE CAPTAIN NAMED

Joanne Peters was on Friday named Matildas captain and Dianne Alagich vice-captain for the upcoming Australia Cup and Oceania Olympic Qualifying Tournament.

It is a new captaincy pairing, Peters with experience as a vice-captain for the past year including at the 2003 Women's World Cup, whilst Alagich celebrates her first leadership role for a national team since she captained the Australian U16 Team to an undefeated tour to New Zealand in 1995.

Peters was part of a three-strong leadership group named in January 2003 headed by Cheryl Salisbury as Matildas captain, with Peters and Sacha Wainwright joint vice-captains. For these two upcoming tournaments, both Salisbury and Wainwright are out injured with knee injuries.

Peters, a long-time resident of Sydney who recently relocated to Newcastle, has competed at both the 1999 and 2003 Women's World Cups. The 24-year-old midfielder also played the 2003 season in the WUSA professional league with New York Power.

Alagich, defender from Adelaide, is a veteran of the 1999 and 2003 Women's World Cups and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. The 24-year-old played all three seasons of the WUSA with San Jose CyberRays, 2001 champions.

The two are looking forward to the challenge of leading a new-look Matildas team which includes five debutantes.

AUSTRALIA CUP TICKETING INFORMATION
Adult : $10
Student/Concession : $5
Children Under 16 years : FREE

ALL TICKETS AT GATE ON MATCH DAY.
Gates open one and a half hours prior to kickoff time of first match.

6TH AUSTRALIA CUP
Australia ~ China ~ DPR Korea ~ New Zealand

MATCH SCHEDULE
QEII STADIUM, BRISBANE

Wed 18 February 5.00pm
7.30pm Australia v New Zealand
China v DPR Korea
Sat 21 February 2.00pm
4.30pm New Zealand v China
Australia v DPR Korea
Tue 24 February 5.00pm
7.30pm DPR Korea v New Zealand
Australia v China

Dianne Alagich (Above) will be the Matildas vice-captain while Joanne Peters will lead out the Green and Gold as the skipper

TOURNAMENT VENUE :
QEII STADIUM (previously also known as ANZ Stadium)
Kessels Rd (cnr Mains Rd)
Nathan QLD 4111
All times are Brisbane time (add one hour for AEST)

AUSTRALIA
1st World Cup, China 1991 Did not qualify
2nd World Cup, Sweden 1995 12th Place
Olympic Games, Atlanta 1996 Did not qualify
3rd World Cup, USA 1999 11th Place
Olympic Games, Sydney 2000 7th Place
4th World Cup, USA 2003 13th Place
Current FIFA World Ranking 16

CHINA
1st World Cup, China 1991 5th Place
2nd World Cup, Sweden 1995 4th Place
Olympic Games, Atlanta 1996 Silver Medallists
3rd World Cup, USA 1999 Runners-Up
Olympic Games, Sydney 2000 5th Place
4th World Cup, USA 2003 Equal 6th Place
Current FIFA World Ranking 5

One Matilda to watch out for young gun Lisa De Vanna could be the next big thing in the Australian women's game.

NORTH KOREA
1st World Cup, China 1991 Did not qualify
2nd World Cup, Sweden 1995 Did not qualify
Olympic Games, Atlanta 1996 Did not qualify
3rd World Cup, USA 1999 10th Place
Olympic Games, Sydney 2000 Did not qualify
4th World Cup, USA 2003 11th Place
Current FIFA World Ranking 7

NEW ZEALAND
1st World Cup, China 1991 11th Place
2nd World Cup, Sweden 1995 Did not qualify
Olympic Games, Atlanta 1996 Did not qualify
3rd World Cup, USA 1999 Did not qualify
Olympic Games, Sydney 2000 Did not qualify
4th World Cup, USA 2003 Did not qualify
Current FIFA World Ranking 21

THE MATILDAS

No.	Name	State	Hometown	DOB	Pos	Caps	Goals
1	Cassandra KELL	NSW	Central Coast	08/08/80	GK	13	0
2	Gill FOSTER	ACT	Sydney	28/08/76	M	25	0
3	Karla REUTER	QLD	Toowoomba	14/06/84	D	6	0
4	Dianne ALAGICH	SA	Adelaide	12/05/79	D	43	3
5	Rhian DAVIES	ACT	Sydney	05/01/81	D	26	2
6	Tal KARP	ACT	Perth	30/12/81	M	20	2
7	Sarah WALSH	QLD	Sydney	11/01/83	F	-	-
8	Bryony DUUS	QLD	Brisbane	07/10/77	M	46	2
9	April MANN	QLD	Brisbane	21/04/78	F	25	13
10	Joanne PETERS	NNSW	Leeton	11/03/79	M	56	14
11	Lisa DE VANNA	WA	Perth	14/11/84	F	-	-
12	Pam GRANT	QLD	Rockhampton	15/11/82	D	10	0
13	Amy TAYLOR	ACT	Canberra	11/06/79	D	20	3
14	Leah BLAYNEY	NSW	Blue Mountains	04/07/86	M	-	-
15	Lana HARCH	QLD	Toowoomba	23/11/84	M	-	-
16	Kate McSHEA	QLD	Brisbane	13/04/83	M	17	0
17	Katie GILL	NNSW	Newcastle	10/12/84	F	-	-
18	Melissa BARBIERI	VIC	Melbourne	20/01/80	GK	12	0

HEAD TO HEAD - AUSTRALIA v CHINA W-D-L 2-1-13
Most recent results -

25/09/03	World Cup	Los Angeles USA	Draw	1-1
31/08/03	Pre-World Cup Tour	Qingdao CHN	China won	2-0
28/08/03	Pre-World Cup Tour	Jinan CHN	China won	2-0
17/08/00	Nth Korea/China Tour	Shanghai CHN	Australia won	0-0, 5-4ps
14/08/00	Nth Korea/China Tour	Yangzhou CHN	China won	3-0
02/06/00	Pacific Cup	Sydney AUS	China won	1-1aet, 5-4ps

HEAD TO HEAD - AUSTRALIA v KOREA DPR W-D-L 1-2-2

11/08/00	Nth Korea/China Tour	Pyongyang PRK	Korea DPR won	2-1
08/08/00	Nth Korea/China Tour	Pyongyang PRK	Korea DPR won	2-0
04/09/98	Test Series	Pyongyang PRK	Australia won	1-0
01/09/98	Test Series	Pyongyang PRK	Draw	0-0
29/08/98	Test Series	Pyongyang PRK	Draw	0-0

HEAD TO HEAD - AUSTRALIA v NEW ZEALAND W-D-L 14-5-9
Most recent results -

13/09/03	World Cup Qualifiers	Canberra AUS	Australia won	2-0
07/06/00	Pacific Cup	Newcastle AUS	Australia won	4-0
17/10/98	World Cup Qualifiers	Auckland NZL	Australia won	3-1
19/10/97	Tri-Nations Series	Newcastle AUS	Australia won	2-0
30/03/96	M-Wey Tri-Series	Auckland NZL	Australia won	2-0
24/03/96	M-Wey Tri-Series	Auckland NZL	Australia won	3-0

Previous Australia Cups :

1999	1st AUSTRALIA	2nd Italy	3rd Canada	
2000	1st USA 2nd Sweden	3rd AUSTRALIA	4th Czech Republic	
2001	1st AUSTRALIA	2nd France		
2002	1st AUSTRALIA	2nd South Korea		
2003	1st Sweden	2nd AUSTRALIA	3rd Mexico	4th South Korea

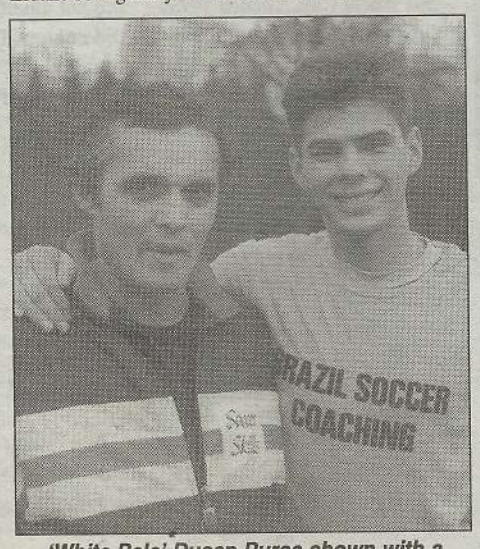
Letters to the Editor/Giveaways

SOCCER SKILLS GIVE-A-WAY

Former Yugoslav superstar Dusan Purac has recently released an instructional video titled ready, set, goal.

To celebrate the release of Dusan's second video *Australian & British Soccer Weekly* will be offering readers a chance to win Dusan's first video Soccer Skills.

Dusan has been a skills coach for over twenty years and strives to teach youngsters to get a feel for the ball so they can perform the breathtaking maneuvers that Zidane so regularly thrills his fans with.



'White Pele' Dusan Purac shown with a young AC Milan star Zvonimir Boban.

Dusan shown with his current young batch of stars at one of his soccer academies.

The video also emphasizes Dusan's other philosophies; that soccer skills must be developed in childhood and hard work and perseverance are essential in developing skills and becoming a more proficient soccer player.

For 40 mins Dusan and several boys take us through basic skills such as dribbling, as well as crossing, and step-overs.

The video originally released in 1988 features a young Zvonimir Boban and Dejan Savicevic dazzling us with the ball control skills that saw them both become key members of the AC Milan's legendary European Cup winning team of the early 90's.

Also Inter's Darko Dancev, former European top junior of the year also features in the Soccer Skills video.

For your chance to win one of four of these great videos simply answer the question, who did AC Milan defeat in last season's Champions League final.

Send your answers to *ABSW*'s email address on absw007@hotmail.com titled 'Dusan Purac Competition'.

Good Luck

LE COQ SPORTIF BOOTS GIVE-AWAY

ABSW in association with French soccer brand Le Coq Sportif are giving you the chance to win soccer boots that will revolutionize the sport as we know it today.

Having started the company back in 1920, Le Coq Sportif has been a major brand in Europe and has kitted the likes of France, Senegal and Greece to name a few along side a string of other European clubs.

Currently kick-starting its promotions in Australia, the brand famous for its Rooster label has given *ABSW* two 'Triatom' soccer boots.

With its orientable and adjustable studs, the TRIATOM TRI MOTION soccer shoe is probably the best soccer shoe in the world and the first shoe, which adapts to the soccer players field position and the pitch.

Details on this competition will given in the next few weeks, so keep an eye out for it – its certainly not one to miss.

le coq sportif

NO SHOW FOR BRAZIL

Dear Sir,

The absence of Brazil from this year's Olympic Games football tournament is a shock and a real shame, in my opinion.

The Olympic Games is an opportunity for the most elite athletes from around the world to join together and compete for honours. Brazil have without a doubt, the greatest footballers on the planet. They currently hold all three men's world championships, plus futsal, beach soccer, you name it, they have it!

Ronaldo will NOT be at the Olympics in Athens due to Brazil's failure to qualify.

Which leads me to the question: Why does South America have only two places in the tournament, and Africa and Asia more? Are we meant to believe that this represents the strengths of the international game? I don't think so.

The Brazilians may have been a little too relaxed in the qualifying tournament, but they (along with Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, Chile) should not have to squeeze themselves into two positions.

The Olympics will be a lesser tournament without the samba kings!

David Oliveira.
Penshurst, NSW.

LACK OF AFRICAN INTEREST

Dear Sir,

I am amazed at the lack of coverage of the African Nations Cup, one of the best tournaments in world soccer.

It lacks absolutely nothing in comparison with the European Championships or the Copa America. Teams are more likely to send their best players to the tournament, and these players certainly give their all to achieve success, unlike the Brazil team of the last Copa, which was severely understrength and lost to Honduras, of all teams!

And in terms of entertainment, it is probably the most open and exciting event.

While European teams have their tactical discipline, South Americans have their silky skills and often tough tackling, the Africans have both.

Nigeria, Cameroon, Senegal and other nations combine excellent organisation with childlike abandon when they take the field, a breath of fresh air, really.

If media outlets are serious about providing comprehensive global coverage, they simply must look outside Europe and South America and recognise the delights of Africa.

Simon Rushton.
Terrigal, NSW.

OLYROOS TO ATHENS!

Dear Sir,

Congratulations must go to the Olyroos on qualifying for the Olympic Games.

Their success has created a new sense of optimism in many of my soccer supporting friends. The majority of players in this squad have bright futures in the game, and the Athens Games will prove to be another excellent stepping stone towards World Cup qualification.

While many people have stated that Australia is currently undergoing a crisis in terms of youth players, I beg to differ. True, we have many veterans in the current Socceroos squad, but the Under 23 players will be challenging for their positions this year and next year.

Ahmad Elrich was one of our stars in the recent Olyroo squad.

Consider someone like Ahmad Elrich, who has improved out of sight in terms of his passing and goalscoring. The contest between him and Brett Emerton for the Socceroos will be worth watching in the years to come.

So, for those that think Aussie soccer is on the way down, hold on because this roller coaster ride is on the way up again!

Carmen Dury.
Homebush, NSW.

THE NSL LOW-DOWN

Dear Sir,

How heartening has it been to see clubs that appear down and out in this season's campaign, making a fist of things in the second half of the season.

Unlike last season, when we had two teams ahead of the rest, and a top six race which was ended as a contest weeks before the conclusion, this year represents a good change.

Perth are challenged by two teams instead of just Olympic- Parramatta and Souths are certainly in the running to win the championship.

Below that, it is even more interesting. Each Sydney club, with the exception of Northern Spirit, remain in the finals reckoning, while Brisbane, Newcastle and even Wollongong have been impressive also.

The new-old finals series is definitely more interesting, with the possibility of a higher placed team being knocked out if they have an off day.

Let's hope that potential investors are keeping an eye on things in the NSL. With fewer clubs and a more streamlined and above all, consistent competition, more fans will want to come along and see what all the fuss is about.

Reginald Bracy.
Essendon, VIC.

KEWELL DOES THE JOB

Dear Sir,

To all those critics that suggested Harry Kewell was un-Australian and that he was NOT going to be in Frank Farina's squad against Venezuela this week should really shut their mouths.

For far too long I've been reading in the mainstream press that Kewell was not willing to play for the Green and Gold and that he'd rather choose club over country and yet he's opted to play for Australia.

Some journalists should really get their stories straight.

Kewell is and will be one of Australia's most finest talents, constant bagging and heckling of our best player will only do this country a bad thing rather than good.

The best man for the job – Liverpool's Harry Kewell.

Who in their right minds will go against such a player in other countries.

Italy treat their stars like Totti, Del Piero, Baggio like kings and yet we can't do the same.

Its fine time we put a stop to negative press comments and more positive stories on how better the Socceroos will go with the support of our stars.

Phillip Stokes,
Croydon Park, NSW

FARINA'S WAY

Dear Sir,

After reading the Socceroos article in *ABSW* last week, it does look like Frank Farina has a plan on how to qualify for the next World Cup, and has a pretty good idea of what players will be used throughout the qualifying campaign.

The squad looks quite compact and well-knit. There is back up in almost every position and these guys have been involved in matches together in the past.

I think the players that Farina has at his disposal are quite flexible in terms of their positioning. We all know that Kewell can play up front or on the left of midfield, Lucas Neill can slot in at right back or wing-back, as can Brett Emerton, who offers an extra attacking dimension down the flank. And the selection of Simon Colosimo and Ahmad Elrich from the NSL is an indication that a number of home based players are also up to scratch when talking about the national team.

Players like Clint Bolton and Tom Pondeljak should also be considered for future internationals.

But for now, plans for the World Cup qualifiers seem to be going well. This match in Venezuela is the type of fixture that Australia should be playing more regularly.

Sonja Jones.
Ballarat, VIC.

Tasmanian bid for APL?

Soccer Tasmania met up with a group of Hobart businessmen last week in the hope of establishing a Tasmanian team in the new national league.

Hobart-based property developer Sean Bissett is behind the push, which would involve around 28 full-time positions, including 18 players.

Soccer Tasmania's chief executive David Smith says the meeting will look at whether the proposal is viable, as well as any support his group can offer.

"To put a team in the Australian premier league, really your start-up capital is about A$5 million," he said.

"These guys aren't just running around for the sake of it, they're very keen and obviously to make that sort of decision you need to investigate a lot of it. One of the major things, I would imagine, is whether it's viable or not for a Tasmanian team to be in the national league."

A strong push has seen many people believe that Tasmania should get a spot in the new APL next season – under the Frank Lowy regime, Tasmania looks likely to field a squad.

GOUTZIOULIS RELEASED FROM OLYMPIC

Sydney Olympic last week announced that midfielder George Goutzioulis has been released from his contract only weeks after signing with the club this season.

Goutzioulis was dismissed during last week for a 'crazy' two-footed tackle on Marconi striker Joe Spiteri and may face a tribunal hearing. "George has been released by the club and is returning to Melbourne," Olympic president Stephen Kamper told the *Daily Telegraph.*

Kamper also stated that the new NSL can kiss its hopes of becoming professional goodbye, after stating referee Con Diomis' performance during the match was appalling.

Known for his never-say-die attitude on the pitch, 'Gouzti' took it one step too far against the Stallions that started up a scuffle after his dismissal.

Both Goutzioulis and Troy Halpin, who joined the Blues halfway through the season sparked up a mini revival for Olympic, but it all came apart after their loss to cross-town rivals Marconi.

Its is rumoured that Goutzioulis could well go back to the Victorian Premier League and see out the rest of the season in his home-town after a few years of absence from Victoria.

No more George Goutzioulis at OKI Jubilee Oval after the midfielder was released from Sydney Olympic last week.

NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE 2003-2004 NORTHERN DIVISION ROUND 24

LEAGUE LADDER

	P	W	D	B	L	F	A	Pts
Canberra Deakin	**20**	**14**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**62**	**26**	**46**
Parramatta Power	21	14	2	3	5	55	31	44
AIS	19	13	3	4	3	48	15	42
Newcastle United	20	11	3	3	6	45	26	36
Marconi Stallions	22	11	3	2	8	40	30	36
Wollongong Wolves	19	9	3	4	7	36	27	30
Northern Spirit	20	8	5	4	7	31	30	29
Brisbane Strikers	19	7	0	4	12	28	47	21
Sydney United	21	6	2	3	13	30	51	20
Sydney Olympic	19	5	4	4	10	36	48	19
QAS	18	4	2	4	12	33	52	14
ACTAS	20	1	1	3	18	14	75	4

FRIDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2004

Wollongong Wolves 5
(Werasko 11', Hall 30', De Giovanniello 42', Robinson 85', Abel 91'))

QAS 3
(De Silva 13', Smits 39', 44')

Northern Spirit 1
(Groves 34')

Parramatta Power 3
(Musumeci 6', Own Goal 74', Bridge 87')

SATURDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2004

Canberra Deakin 4
(Cattanach 15', 88', Pideski 80', Wilk 82')

Brisbane Strikers 0

Marconi Stallions 1
(Oricchio 87')

Sydney United 2
(Simic 72', 80')

AIS 2
(Casey 85', 89')

ACTAS 0

Match Brought Forward From R26
FRIDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2004

AIS 2
(Thornton 10', Bahnsen 42')

Brisbane Strikers 0

BYE – Newcastle United
BYE – Sydney Olympic

NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE 2003-2004
NORTHERN DIVISION FIXTURES – ROUND 25

DEFERRED MATCH FROM RD 18 –
To be Played on Tuesday 17 February 2004
Brisbane Strikers Vs QAS
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: Perry Park
FRIDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2004
ACTAS Vs Northern Spirit
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: Hawker Oval
Parramatta Power Vs Sydney Olympic
Time: 5.10 pm
Venue: Parramatta Stadium
Newcastle United Vs Canberra Deakin
Time: 5.15 pm
Venue: Energy Australia Stadium
SATURDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2004
Brisbane Strikers Vs Wollongong Wolves
Time: 4.00 pm
Venue: Perry Park
QAS Vs AIS
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: Richlands Stadium
DEFERRED MATCH FROM RD 13 –
To be Played on Sunday 22 February 2004
Brisbane Strikers Vs AIS
Time: 4.00 pm
Venue: Perry Park
DEFERRED MATCH FROM RD 6 –
To be Played on Wednesday 25 February 2004
Wollongong Wolves Vs AIS
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: Brandon Park

BYE – Marconi Stallions
BYE – Sydney United

PREMIERSHIP BIZARRIO

It's Nige and Derek here from BananaTV's Premiership Bizarrio. Each week we give you the news and our views from around the grounds of the English Premier League.

This week has seen the advent of an event that no football fan thought was possible, the gagging of Chelski's former illustrious leader, Cuddly Ken Bates. The bearded one has had his weekly column in the Chelski football program pulled before the home game with Charlton.

There were obviously some scathing comments that new supremo, Peter Kenyon, deemed were inappropriate and substituted the Pulitzer piece with a profile of his own. Cuddly Ken then cracked the s**ts and said that after 21 years of weekly hot air, he would not be writing another word.

Beardy, we've got news for you. Don't you think that is exactly what Kenyon wanted? Kenyon, whose tenure as CEO commenced this week, came in with the bang and followed up the gagging with the statement that if Chelski didn't win a trophy this year it would be a disaster. This sparked a response from Claudia Ranieri that we are still trying to decipher.

Still on the Chelski front, England gaffer Steve Goran Eriksson has been forced to sit down and discuss his contract extension until the end of the 2006 World Cup. Steve has been continually causing unrest at Soho Square by fanning the flames that he could go AWOL to SW1 after the Euro 2004 tournament.

The FA have finally had a gutful and are demanding a chinwag, fearing that Steve could do a runner as did Don Revie in the 70's. The major difference in that situation was that Revie got his sorry backside to the deserts of the UAE. Does Steve Eriksson really believe that he will get an easy life in Chelski if he tries to pull the same stunt? Wake up and smell the coffee Steve, you made history by being the first foreign geezer to get the top job. Your life in this country will be hell.

Other Bizarrio news has Saints CEO, Rupert Lowe paving the way for a return to football for pariah, Glen Hoddle. This is a Bizarrio turn in events as 2 years ago Hod was branded a traitor when he quit the Saints in controversial circumstances to take on his dream job that turned into a nightmare at Hart Attack Lane.

Lowe claims that he and Hod have kissed and made up. However, we can't see the Saints fans being so forgiving. We expect that the appointment will happen by the time you finish reading this article.

The latest on the Sir Fergy versus Madge and Macca wars has seen Madge and Macca purchase a cool 20 million squids worth of extra shares in ManU, increasing the Made and Macca stake to 28.89%.

The 2 Irish nag owners have now demanded 3 seats on the board in a clear attempt to pile the pressure on Sir Fergy. 29% means they have too lodge a takeover bid, of which they have said they are not interested in doing. This pair has never even been to Old Traff.

Dropping down the Premier League and into the bottom 3 of Nationwide Division 1; Nottingham Footrest's new gaffer, Joe Kinnear has promised to drink a bucket full of Guinness in the centre circle if Footrest beat the drop. Not a bit stunt you might think! However, the Doc told Joe, who had a heart attack a few years ago, that he would have to give up his favourite tipple if he was to live. So this could be a death-defying stunt. We hope for Joe's sake that Footrest goes down.

We now go across the seas to sunny Brazil where amateur ref, Jose Figuiro Ferro tried to show Paulo Coise a red card. Ferro reached into his pocket to pull out the card but instead pulled out a pair of lady's red lacy underwear. Having lost all credibility with players and fans rolling around with their sides splitting, Ferro decided to abandon the match 20 minutes early. There was one person in the crowd that was not amused, Ferro's missus. She didn't recognise the underwear as her own and has proceeded to file for divorce. Ferro tried a number of excuses such as he didn't have any idea how they got there (oh yeah) and the excuse of the decade which had us squirming, that they were a present from his daughter. We don't want to think too much about that one!

Gor Blimey, there endith another week of Bizarrio in the Premier League! You can tune your computers in each week to www.bananatv.com and get all the latest bollocks

See you here next week.

Nige & Derek
Premiership Bizarrio

Nottingham Forest's new gaffa Joe Kinnear.

Green and Gold Army Series

Green & Gold Army
http://www.ggarmy.com

SOCCERNOOS

Good luck to Frank and the Socceroos

There has been plenty of debate about the team make up but now its time to put that aside and get down to the business of supporting the boys. Godspeed to the lads who are venturing to the unfriendly confines of South America for the first time since…..we can't bring ourselves to say it.
Be sure to watch the game where ever you are

Events for Socceroos v Venezuela

Due to the timing of the match it is difficult to put on any really big events for the match-however if you have the morning off and want to get together with like minded GGArmy people check out the site – GGARMY.COM - for details (negotiations still under way as we go to press)

Tours for Athens, Euro and beyond

The GGArmy are in negotiations with our travel partners to offer some exciting travel packages for Euro in June/July and Athens in August.
More details as they come to hand – so stay tuned

Matildas in action in this month

The Matildas begin their own Olympic preparations in Brisbane with the Australia Cup and Qualifiers. For GGA members in Brisbane interested in supporting the girls head www.matildas.org.au or ggarmy.com (shortly) for more details.
Matches will be played 18-24 February at QEII Stadium (ANZ Stadium).

New T-Shirt Orders now being taken

Amazingly all the GGArmy T-Shirts made for the Sydney Qualifiers have sold out- we are in the process of making another batch- to place your order e-mail admin@ggarmy.com with your size and quantity and we will get them out as soon as they are available. They are $20 each plus postage.

New features at ggarmy.com

Check out the site for the latest up to the minute news on the Socceroos and the other national teams. Apart from photos from recent games in the gallery, we have added some more exciting features including video games and wall paper to download – there is always something new on ggarmy.com so bookmark it today

A helping hand for Deaf Soccer Australia

The Australian Men's and Women's Deaf soccer team are in desperate need of funding for the Deaflympic, Melbourne 2005. They need your help and support to raise approx $160,000 to send both Men's and Women's to the games. The More people who donate, the more it will help make the trip and represent the Green and Gold. You can donate directly to their account listed below. Every dollar helps.

Westpac
Deaf Soccer Australia
BSB 034-108
Acc Num 167035
Mt Ommany Qld

Bring on the 'Prime Time' Socceroos

By Mark van Aken

When stripped down to the bare bones Socceroos friendlies serve two purposes.

One is to simply get the players together and give them match practice to familiarise themselves enough that they can whip the pants of some 5th place South American team in a couple of years time.

The other is even simpler – to let Australians see them play. In other words, afford Aussie soccer nuts the same pleasure that fans of League, Union, Cricket, Netball, Tennis – the list goes on- have, that is seeing their national team in action. Gees, even Aussie Rules fans get to see their so-called 'national team' more than us.

By the time we have clashed with South Africa in March next month, Australia will have played 5 friendlies in just over 12 months.

The opposition has each time been vastly different and largely challenging, providing a big tick in the column of the first objective of team practice. No doubt Frank Farina would have liked more games at a greater consistency but all things being equal it's a handy bag of fixtures.

For John Q Socceroo Fan however we have been left largely duded. The basis of Channel 7 having any interest in soccer wasn't for those big Eastern Pride versus Canberra Cosmos clashes of days gone by in the NSL, but rather the jewel in the crown; the Socceroos.

Over the aforementioned fixtures the national team has bounced from SBS to 7 and now back to SBS for the Venezuela and South Africa games.

We can all wax lyrical about 7 'screwing soccer' but at the end of the day Kerry Stokes and the team at 7 are no different than any other TV network - they are in it for the ratings and the NSL just didn't rate.

The Socceroos apparently do, but not at the obscure times that we schedule our games. 7 have the rights to Australian Rugby, again not for the Super 12 – which they have now dropped from their line up – but rather the Wallabies.

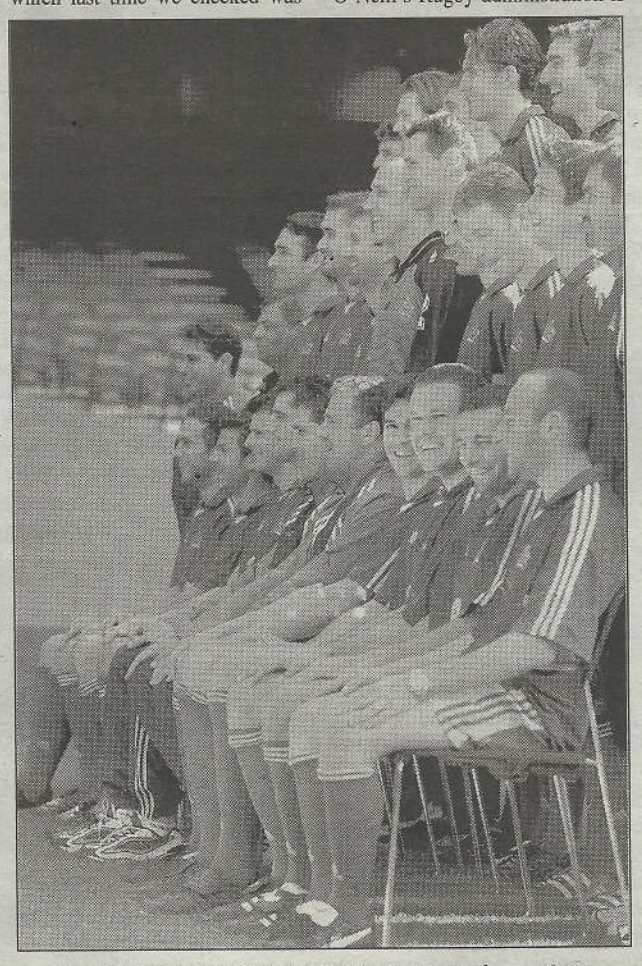
The Socceroos play a sport enjoyed by 800,000 or so registered participants while the Wallabies can call on only 89,000 playing 'Rugger'. By my calculations the Socceroos can (and will) eclipse the Wallabies if they are allowed to play at decent times back home.

The famous England game was at 7am Eastern Time on a weekday. This was a perfect time to get people in at places like Federation Square in Melbourne but another 19 and a half million Aussies were on their way to work, school or Centrelink.

The next time we saw our boys in action was against Ireland. It was screened on a 2-hour delay at 6am in the morning on yet another weekday. Next up the Reggae Boyz, the timing of the Jamaica game I hear you ask?

Very late on a Sunday night, which last time we checked was again preceding a 'school day'.

Now our impending assignment in Caracas is 10am on, you guessed it, a weekday. One thing that has happened under John O'Neill's Rugby administration is consistency in the scheduling of Wallabies fixtures.



A portrait shot of the last Socceroo squad – spot any familiar faces?

During the International Rugby season you know that there will be a Wallabies game each Saturday night at or around 6.30pm.

One of the reasons we have made the UK our pseudo base is that most of our players are based there or on the neighboring continent. Surely another was that it gave us control over our own fixtures (most of the time-obviously not against England).

If so, can these games not be played during the day (Greenwich time) to provide prime time matches back home on a Saturday night? Even then the networks may not want the games, but we wont know until we try and at worst it give SBS a killer prime time draw card.

It may be robbing Peter to pay Paul, but we should also do our best to get these games on the major networks. SBS has been (and continues to be) a great ambassador for the world game, but mainstream Australia largely ignores it.

When you are on SBS you are automatically entrenching a wide spread doctrine that soccer is just a game for non-WASP Australians.

Of course it isn't, but staying within our own narrow parameters isn't the way forward. Which is somewhat disappointing because SBS do give soccer the royal treatment and don't dare wedge commercials into the broadcast, not during the game anyway.

Keep in mind most households don't even have a proper UHF antenna to pick up SBS clearly. Hence the reason for my entire World Cup collection having an array of dots and lines running through it before Channel 9 came to the rescue in Japan and Korea. Of course for the most of the tourney however SBS were perfect hosts.

Under a more business savvy Lowy-O'Neill regime we must see our Socceroos fixtures booked perhaps more for commercial interests than Frank Farina's.

Considering that the current set-up wouldn't exactly be pleasing the pants off the national coach, why not go for the hook of pleasing the other 20 million Aussies who get up and go to work 40 odd hours a week? Let's steal a line or two from a classic Aussie Rules song to sum it all up;

'You work to earn a living,
But on weekends comes the time,
You can do whatever turns you on,
Get out and clear your mind,
Me I like football, but there's a lot of things around,
When you line them up together – the footy wins hands down'

Here's to the Socceroos – coming soon to a time when you can actually see them!

SNOWFLAKES FROM HELL

IN MEMORY OF THE MUNICH DISASTER

Special Tribute
By Richard Kreider

Forty-six years ago, a British European Airways flight which claimed the lives of some of the United Kingdom's superlative football heroes should never have left Riem Airport.

The chartered flight on February 6, 1958 was scheduled to bring among others, representatives of the mighty Manchester United football team and several journalists home to England following a 3-3 draw with Red Star Belgrade in Yugoslavia. The result had secured the mighty United team a semi-final berth in the European Cup.

However, a blizzard during a brief fuel-stop in Munich was making take off difficult for pilot Captain James Thain.

After two aborted attempts, the captain finally hauled the 47-seater twin-engine Elizabethan aircraft (G-ALZU) off the runway, but with very little airspeed after having gone past the point of no return.

Snow had already been tumbling when the plane touched down and was falling heavily on take-off, where a build-up of slush had acted as a drag on the rolling wheels.

Seconds later, and after resisting the pilots' valiant efforts to gain greater altitude, flight B-line 609 fell into the village of Kirchtrudering just after 3:15pm.

The plane struck a two-storey house before hitting the ground where amazingly, only the centre area of the plane caught alight upon impact as the number of survivors including the pilot illustrated. Half of 'Zulu Uniform' broke off and debris was cast over a large area.

Seven players died instantly: Full-back Geoff Bent, England left-half and club captain Roger Byrne, Eddie Colman (right-half), Mark Jones (centre-half), David Pegg (outside-left), Tommy Taylor (England centre-forward) and Republic of Ireland international Liam 'Billy' Whelan (inside-forward).

21-year old England left-half Duncan Edwards lost his battle for life 15 days later in the Rechts der Isar hospital.

Jackie Blanchflower and Johnny Berry sustained serious injuries which prevented them from ever playing again.

As well as the players, United's secretary Walter Crickmer, trainer Tommy Curry and coach Bert Whalley died also, as did eight journalists, including the former England goalkeeper Frank Swift who was then writing for the "News of the World.'

In total, 23 of the 43 passengers lost their lives, 20 instantly. Queen Elizabeth wasted little time in sending a telegram to the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Alderman L Lever. "My husband and I have learned with great regret of the tragedy which will have caused so much grief to the citizens of Manchester."

Yugoslav leader Marshall Tito was quick to also offer sympathy.

"I am deeply moved by the news of the disaster, which has severely struck British sport and the English people. I express my profound condolences," he said.

United Manager Matt Busby and talented inside-right Bobby Charlton were two of the recognised survivors who continued on with distinguished careers despite the physical and mental scarring.

Former United Centre-half, Bill Foulkes is another who cheated death that afternoon and his interview with Carling-Net just before the 40th anniversary of the air crash, is well worth repeating.

Clearly, the anguish was still with him that day. "The crash just shouldn't have happened. That's the thought that has haunted me all these years," said Foulkes who saw the aircraft split in half directly underneath his seat upon impact.

He then struggled out of his safety belt and ran 50 metres in his socks before looking back at the mangled wreckage and the Union Jack on the tail, engulfed in flames.

A poignant moment perhaps, to a tragedy which claimed one of, if not the greatest English club side ever to grace a football field.

"It was obvious that we would struggle to take off and they took the chance," said Foulkes.

"They should never have done that. I don't feel guilty about being a survivor. I was just damned lucky. But I do harbour this feeling that it wasn't necessary, that angers me. It cost the club, it cost the country so much."

In tribute, the traditional singing of The Flowers of Manchester under the Munich plaque (on the corner of Old Trafford's K Stand and United Road) was held last Wednesday at 7pm local time – one hour before the kickoff to United's English Premier League home clash with Middlesborough.

LATE EDITION — London Herald — LATE EDITION

FRIDAY 7th FEBRUARY 1958

BUSBY BABES KILLED IN PLANE TRAGEDY

Disaster in Munich

Manchester in Mourning

What the 'London Herald' said about the tragedy that rocked Manchester United.

Despotovski fears for fellow pros future

Perth Glory striker Bobby Despotovski says delaying the kick-off of new National Premier League competition will drive many players to the wall.

Glory striker Bobby Despotovski fears NSL players will struggle due to the 'long' off-season break.

Despotovski fears many current NSL players will struggle to make ends meet with so much uncertainty over contract liabilities and the future of many current clubs.

In his column for the Sunday Times, Despotovski wrote:

"Frank Lowy's celebrated 10-team competition is not expected to be up and running until late January or early February. If that's the case, players won't be required for pre-season training until around December.

That means players, many with young families, will not be paid for up to five months.

"It doesn't make sense, but the game's powerbrokers must understand that the players need to live. That the competition will be delayed until early next year is a major concern because everybody has known about the new guidelines for long enough.

"There is little doubt Perth Glory will be in the competition - and Adelaide United. But, as for the other eight clubs, nobody knows. That's not an ideal situation.

Many players could well play in the smaller state leagues as part of fitness until the start of the new season but will risk injury if the task is at hand.

The uncertainty of the league has cast a shadow on many of the players futures with some dealing with more than one club in wanting to play in next year's APL.

Tigana linked with Aussie job

Former Fulham manager Jean Tigana is being linked with Frank Farina's Australia coaching job.

The Frenchman is a free agent after leaving Fulham at the end of last season following a fallout with Harrods owner Mohamed Al Fayed.

Tigana's name has been bandied about in local football circles in recent weeks and was linked with Australia's top coaching job in the 'Sunday Telegraph' two weeks ago.

Sources close to the former AS Monaco trainer insist he will not coach in England again after the acrimonious way he departed Fulham last year.

Interestingly, Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier, who worked with Tigana while with the French Football Federation, has confirmed talks with Australian Soccer Association officials about a variety of subjects concerning the country's coaching set-up.

The one stumbling block for Tigana's move to Australia would be his court battle with Fulham. Its reported that Tigana is suing for money owed - believed to be £2 million - over a share issue while at Fulham. In turn, the Cottagers are suing Tigana over the fees he paid for several of his transfers.

Tigana was on around £1.5 million-a-year while at Fulham. However current Socceroo coach Frank Farina looks as though he will not budge after gaining support from his fellow players that they want him as their coach.

Ex-Fulham coach John Tigana has been linked with a possible move as Australia's next coach?

Oz Soccer player banned for 20 years

AN indoor soccer player on Queensland's Sunshine Coast has been banished from the sport for 20 years after punching a referee in the face.

Kawana player Jarrad Ryan received a 20-year ban from the sport's governing body, Indoor Cricket Queensland, after pleading guilty last week to assaulting referee Ian Forde during an A-grade semi-final on January 31.

ICQ executive officer Ray Bubke said today the ban was harsh but fair.

"We have got to send a message that this sort of behaviour won't be tolerated at all," Bubke said.

"We've got a responsibility to protect our officials and hopefully this penalty will send that message out."

Bubke said the incident was sparked after Forde awarded a penalty against Ryan's team which allowed the scores to the levelled with 20 seconds left in the match at the Kawana indoor sports arena.

He said Ryan did not receive a life ban because he showed genujne remorse and the ICQ conduct committee hearing was told his behaviour was out of character.

"It's a very long time but it's also a very serious offence and we feel as though 20 years is appropriate," Bubke said.

He said ICQ did not expect Ryan to appeal the decision as he indicated at the hearing he would accept the consequences of his actions.

VICTORIAN PREMIER LEAGUE 2004

Round 2

Friday 13 February 2004
Oakleigh Cannons 1 Essendon Royals 0
(Xhezair Sulemani)
Saturday 14 February 2004
Altona Magic 1 Green Gully Cavaliers 1
(Steven Camilleri) (Zoran Markovski)
Frankston Pines 3 Bentleigh Greens 0
(Miles Tidd, Nebojsa Vukosavljevic, Aaron Healey)
Sunday 15 February 2004
St Albans Saints 3 Knox City 0
(Hrvoje Matkovic, Ante Deak, Daniel Debevc)
Fawkner Blues 1 Bulleen Zebras 3
(Mark Tsiorlas) (Peter Kakos, Ross Antoniaidis)

Under-21s

Friday 13 February 2004
Oakleigh Cannons 4 Essendon Royals 3
Saturday 14 February 2004
Altona Magic 1 Green Gully Cavaliers 1
Frankston Pines 2 Bentleigh Greens 2
Sunday 15 February 2004
St Albans Saints 4 Knox 1
Fawkner Blues 2 Bulleen Zebras 0
Bentleigh Greens 5 Oakleigh Cannons 0
Essendon Royals 1 Fawkner Blues 6
Knox City 0 Frankston Pines 3

Senior Ladder

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BulleenZebras	**2**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**2**	**6**
OakleighCannons	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
StAlbansSaints	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
FrankstonPines	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
EssendonRoyals	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
PrestonLions	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
GreenGullyCavaliers	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
AltonaMagic	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
KnoxCity	2	0	1	1	0	3	1
WhittleseaStallions	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
FawknerBlues	2	0	0	2	1	5	0
BentleighGreens	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Under-21 Ladder

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BulleenZebras	**2**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**2**	**6**
BentleighGreens	2	1	1	0	7	2	4
FrankstonPines	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
GreenGullyCavaliers	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
PrestonLions	1	1	0	0	6	2	3
StAlbansSaints	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
WhittleseaStallions	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
OakleighCannons	2	1	0	1	4	8	3
AltonaMagic	2	0	1	1	3	7	1
BulleenZebras	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
EssendonRoyals	2	0	0	2	4	10	0
KnoxCity	2	0	0	2	1	7	0

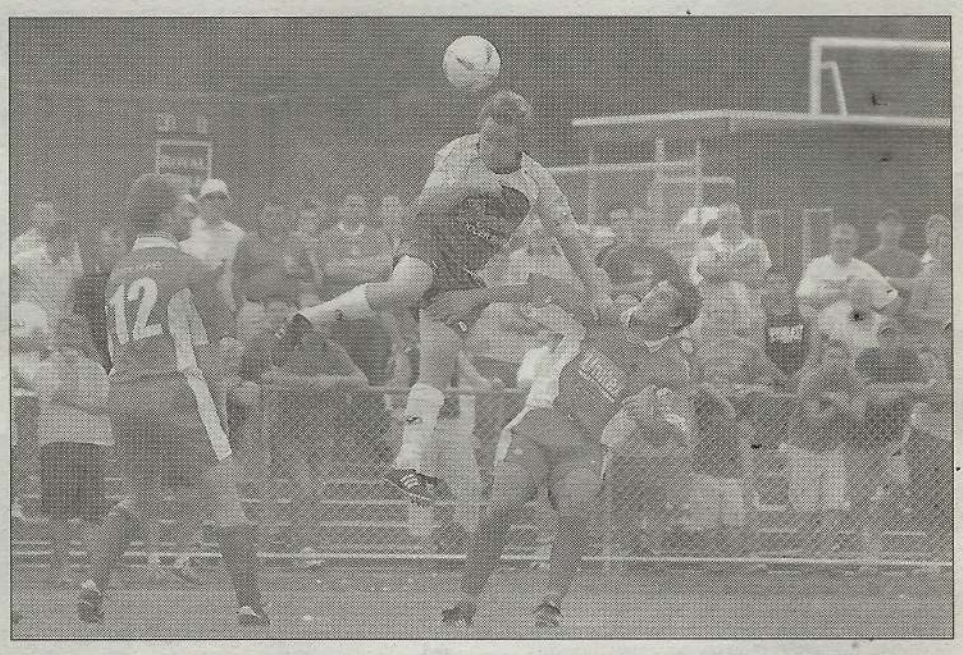
Round Three Fixtures

Sat, 21 Feb, 6:00 pm Preston Lions v Fawkner Blues
Sun, 22 Feb, 5:00 pm Knox City v Altona Magic
Sun, 22 Feb, 6:00 pm St Albans Saints v Frankston Pines
Sun, 22 Feb, 6:00 pm Green Gully Cavaliers v Whittlesea Stallions
Sun, 22 Feb, 6:00 pm Essendon Royals v Bentleigh Greens
Mon, 23 Feb, 8:15pm Bulleen Zebras v Oakleigh Cannons

VPL WRAP - ROUND 2

Feature Match
St Albans defeats Knox City

St Albans proved too strong for league debutantes Knox City as the Saints cruised to a comfortable 3-0 victory in round two of the 2004 La Ionica Men's Victorian Premier League. The hot and humid conditions at Churchill Reserve on Sunday evening set the stage for a strong competitive match, but the odds were against the visitors.



Aerial action - Vic Style - an action photo shown from a recent VPL match. (Photo By Steven Gray)

In front of a fairly large home crowd the Saints were finding it hard to get on top of Knox City for much of the first half, with both teams creating chances. The evenness of the match came to an abrupt end in the 34th minute thanks to a Hrvoje Matkovic goal, which broke the deadlock. Matkovic profited from a mistake from the Knox City defence and St Albans went into the break one goal up.

The diminished morale of the Knox players was visible in the second half as the match turned into 45 minutes of one way traffic. Much of the play remained in the Knox City half as St Albans searched for a second goal, with Anthony Maslic and Jure Radosevic constantly tormenting the Knox defence.

As a cool breeze swept across Churchill reserve Knox City tried to relieve some pressure by adding some of their own, which resulted in a goal attempt that went wide. Knox City's chances were all but terminated when Ante Deak increased St Alban's lead in the 76th minute after a fine combined effort in the penalty box. However Knox City refused to give up and almost scored just minute later but Marijan Vunderl was quick off the mark and produced a fine save to maintain a clean sheet.

Two late changes by Vlado Vanis, St Albans coach proved a success when one of his substitutes Daniel Debevc came in and almost scored immediately of a cross that headed wide. Debevc was denied again a few minutes later by the referee who disallowed a goal for offside. Debevc's push to get on the scoresheet was granted in extra-time when he beat the keeper with a turn and shoot effort from the corner of the penalty box.

The win puts St Albans in fourth place on equal pints with Frankston Pines who also recorded a win.

Source - By Carlos Ibarra (VSF Website)

COASTIES THE WORD FOR SPIRIT

By Luke Doherty

With the likelihood that just 10 teams will be taking part in next years new national league, an unlikely participant has emerged – The Northern Spirit

The club, which has been in administration since January, has received a lifeline from a NSW central coast based consortium, which seems to be loosening the noose that was growing ever tighter round the clubs neck.

The Spirit is still under pressure but it seems as though now there is light starting to appear through a hole that once seemed sealed shut.

"There have been no promises but [the creditors] know what they are up for."

"I've seen the business plan and it is looking good. All we have to do is put a team together that will do them justice."

Match payments are still a big issue. Some players are still owed payments from as far back as last season.

"We have spent the last couple of months trying to survive the best we could," McKinna said.

"It's a credit to the boys that they have stuck together … and hopefully the majority of the squad will stick together next season as well."

The former glory club of the NSL has held a meeting with three members of a new consortium that is prepared to re-launch the club next season.

Sydney doesn't seem like an option.

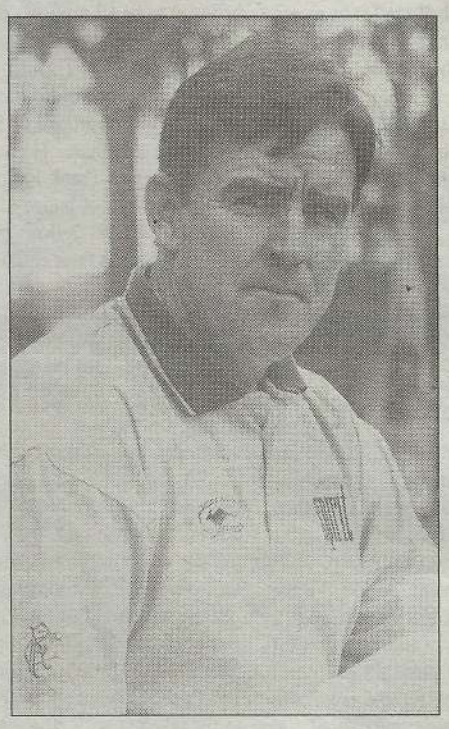
According to the consortium the central coast seems to be the preferred option to Pittwater Park.

A name change could be on the cards as well.

The club could be re-named the Pacific Spirit or Coastal Spirit and play out of the currently desolate Central Coast Stadium.

The former home of the National Rugby League, Northern Eagles joint venture, is the type of stadium that Frank Lowy and the ASA outlined as ideal for the new league.

Central Coast stadium seats 20,000 and was used for the Rugby World Cup. A definite cut above the clubs current home venue.



Lawrie McKinna: Spirit coach is confident that the Spirit will stay in the league next season possibly under a new name and area.

Although McKinna said the club hasn't ruled out a return to North Sydney Oval.

"Gosford don't have their own national team so it's a good option if they decide to go that way" McKinna said.

At this current stage, the Central Coast is supported by one squad that currently has a place in the NSW Summer Super League and have been for quite some time.

During their duration in the Premier League, many players have moved on from the club onto bigger and better things.

Players such as current Leeds United youngster Jaime McMaster and Chievo Verona's fourth string keeper Jess Van Stratten are just some of the many talents that have come from the Coast.

When Frank Lowy announced the plan for the new Australian league in December last year there was more than a healthy dose of pessimism about the belief that corporate Australia would come to the fore and flood the clubs with cash.

Lowy sat before a host of reporters in his high rise suite at Westfield Towers and remained adamant that big business would invest their money going on little more than a blue print.

But after the Northern Spirit's probable turn around from financial hardship to cashed up club – anything is possible.

In other Spirit news, Olyroos striker Dylan Macallister has parted company with the squad temporarily, for trials overseas.

The big strong striker has been a revelation for McKinna's squad this year and it was only time until Europe would call upon Dylan for the second time (The first experience was one he'd rather forget after a short stint in Switzerland).

Axed Okon vows 'to fight'

LONG-serving captain Paul Okon has declared his aim to fight his way back into the Socceroos after being left out of the 20-man squad to play Venezuela in Caracas tomorrow.

Coach Frank Farina omitted Okon, who has played little soccer this season and only recently signed with Belgian second division club Oostende.

"He hasn't played for a long time and to come into an international football match, that's not good enough," said Farina.

"I think he was disappointed but as a professional he expected it and by no means is his career in terms of the national team over."

Given the axe: Paul Okon hopes to once again don the Australian jersey.

Okon issued a statement through his manager saying he is disappointed and wishes the team well, also expressing a desire to continue his international career and help the Socceroos to qualify for the 2006 World Cup.

"I am fully fit and training very hard at my new team KV Oostende in Belgium," said Okon.

"Frank Farina has assured me that regular football will bring me back into contention for selection in future Socceroos matches.

"My goal is to assist Australia in it's quest to qualify for Germany 2006."

National Soccer League

After Round 24	TOTAL							PTS	HOME						AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	Bye	F	A		P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A
PERTH GLORY	21	16	2	3	2	48	18	50	10	10	0	0	29	4	10	6	2	3	19	14
PARRAMATTA POWER	22	14	3	5	1	53	28	45	11	8	2	1	36	11	11	6	1	4	17	17
ADELAIDE UNITED	21	10	7	4	2	26	21	37	10	5	4	1	11	8	11	5	3	3	15	13
SOUTH MELBOURNE	21	11	3	7	2	38	17	36	10	8	0	2	27	9	11	3	3	5	11	8
MARCONI STALLIONS	21	9	7	5	1	26	22	34	12	6	3	3	13	9	9	3	4	2	13	13
BRISBANE STRIKERS	22	9	5	8	2	25	28	32	11	7	3	1	16	8	11	2	2	7	9	20
SYDNEY UNITED	21	7	7	7	2	16	19	28	11	4	5	2	12	7	10	3	3	4	4	12
SYDNEY OLYMPIC	22	7	7	8	2	24	28	28	11	4	3	4	13	12	11	3	4	4	11	16
NEWCASTLE UTD	22	6	6	10	2	18	28	24	11	5	2	4	11	8	11	1	4	6	7	20
WOLLONGONG WOLVES	22	6	5	11	2	30	41	23	11	3	3	5	15	17	11	3	2	6	15	24
NORTHERN SPIRIT	21	6	3	12	2	26	31	21	10	4	2	4	17	12	11	2	1	8	9	19
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS	22	5	4	13	2	19	41	19	11	2	3	6	11	20	11	3	1	7	8	21
KINGZ	22	3	3	16	2	21	47	12	11	2	1	8	13	21	11	1	2	8	8	26

WOLLONGONG WOLVES 0
ADELAIDE UNITED 1
(M Brooks 80')

Referee: Peter Green. **Crowd:** 3,010. **Venue:** WIN Stadium.
Teams: WOLLONGONG WOLVES: Crews, Timpano, Van Blerk, Hughes (Wells 83'), Hawryisuk, Lyons (Van Bentum 52'), Young, Sabljak (Balabanel 70'), Cummins, Blake, Nwaogazi.
Subs Not Used: Angelov (gk)
ADELAIDE UNITED: Scarsella, Alagich, Rees, Goulding, Valkanis (Thompson 76'), Aloisi, Terminello (Westervelt 70'), Veart, Vidmar, Agius (Brooks 60'), Budin.
Subs Not Used: Bajic (gk).
Cautions: B Blake (WW) 89', S Young (WW) 95', R Alagich (AU) 42', N Budin (AU) 57', R Aloisi (AU) 85'.

PERTH GLORY 2
(D Mori 27', A Caceres 85')
NEWCASTLE UNITED 0

Referee: C. Zetter. **Crowd:** 8,678. **Venue:** MembersEquity Stadium.

Teams: PERTH GLORY: Petkovic, Bingley, Hassell, Murphy, Despotovski, North, Pondeljak (Caceres 84'), Mori, Faria, Harnwell, Coyne.
Subs Not Used: Mrdja, Apelgren, Matassa (gk).
NEWCASTLE UNITED: Willis, Deans, Thomas, Prentice (Wilson 64'), R Griffiths, Johnson, Mitchell, Musialik, Middleby, McPherson (Wolfenden 77'), Libbesson (Wallace 30').
Subs Not Used: Kennedy (gk).
Cautions: J Mitchell (NU) 50'.

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Ross Aloisi
(Adelaide United)

The Adelaide United star was a stand-out and led John Kosmina's squad out with a load of courage after suffering a broken thumb during the match against the Wollongong Wolves. Aloisi's experience at international level has helped Adelaide in more ways than one and one thing's for sure, he will prove to be a player to watch out for come Semi-Finals time.

KINGZ 2
(N Hickey 19', H Ngata 59')
SOUTH MELBOURNE 0

Referee: Peter O'Leary. **Crowd:** 892. **Venue:** Ericsson Stadium.

Teams: KINGZ: Utting, Tambouras, Burton, Christie, Campbell (Martin 52'), Hickey, Ngata, Rowley, Donoso, Wylie, Hay (Williams 88').
Subs Not Used: Harries, T Williams (gk).
SOUTH MELBOURNE: Theoklitos, Osman, Panopoulos, Coveny, Boutsianis (Tunbridge 65'), Stergiopoulos, Rechhia, Curcija (Trimboli 74'), Sarkies (Lia 46'), Poutakidis, Tolios.
Subs Not Used: Galekovic (gk).
Cautions: Nil

MARCONI STALLIONS 3
(A Brosque 23', J Harris 47', C Gibson 66')
SYDNEY UNITED 0

Referee: Simon Micallef. **Crowd:** 2,579. **Venue:** Marconi Stadium.

Teams: MARCONI STALLIONS: Turnbull, Bell, Costanzo, Casserly, Gibson, Maloney, Brosque, Thwaite, Harris (Spiteri 57'), Carle (Webb 79'), Renaud (Brodie 71').
Subs Not Used: Alogdellis (gk).
SYDNEY UNITED: Reddy, Haliti (Beldham 57'), Cunico, Vrkic, Langdon (Austin 19'), Huxley, Parisi (Filipovic 78'), Collina, Santalab, Rudan, Doumanis.
Subs Not Used: Necevski (gk).
Cautions: A Brosque (MS) 29', B Renaud (MS) 64', M Turnbull (MS) 84', A Doumanis (SU) 15'.

NORTHERN SPIRIT 0
PARRAMATTA POWER 1
(S Petrovski 23')

Referee: James Lewis. **Crowd:** 1,106. **Venue:** Pittwater Park.

Teams: NORTHERN SPIRIT: Henderson, O'Sullivan, Spencer, Tomasevic, Ferguson, Richter (Mailer 88'), Hutchinson, Petrie, Wilkinson, Osman (Fisher 61'), Milligan (Kwasnik 79').
Subs Not Used: Page (gk).
PARRAMATTA POWER: Bolton, Ceccoli, Beauchamp, Dodd, Gumprecht, Milicic (Sobczyk 76'), Rech, Pantelis, O'Grady, Petrovski (Bridge 86'), Zorbas (Thompson 83').
Subs Not Used: Vukovic (gk).
Cautions: M Osman (NS) 29', S Petrie (NS) 39', A Kwasnik (NS) 79.

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS 2
(R Vargas 27', S Oksuz 88')
BRISBANE STRIKERS 0

Referee: Con Diomis. **Crowd.** 2,469. **Venue:** Knights Stadium.

Teams: MELBOURNE KNIGHTS: Tomich, R Vargas, Marth, Vasilevski, Rocco (Fa;arodo 72'), Leijer, A Vargas, Pelikan, Oksuz, Pantelidis, Marinos (Natsioulas 69').
Subs Not Used: Razov, Loncaric (gk).
BRISBANE STRIKERS: Higgins, Dodd (Moon 61'), McCloughan, McLaren, Grierson, Fitzsimmons (Rose 72'), Webber (Pilic 56'), Brownlie, Brain, McKay, Morely.
Subs Not Used: Baldock (gk).
Cautions: J McCloughan (BS) 93'.

ROUND 25

Fri 20-2-04
Newcastle Utd vs Melbourne Knights
Parramatta Power vs Sydney Olympic
Sat 21-2-04
Brisbane Strikers vs Wollongong Wolves
Sun 22-2-04
Sydney United vs Perth Glory
South Melbourne vs Northern Spirit

R21 Deferred Match - Perth Glory vs Sydney Utd (18th Feb)
Adelaide United vs Marconi (20th Feb)
Northern Spirit vs Kingz (20th Feb)

Results (Amended Fixtures)
Parramatta Power 3
Brisbane Strikers 2

Marconi Stallions 1
Sydney Olympic 0

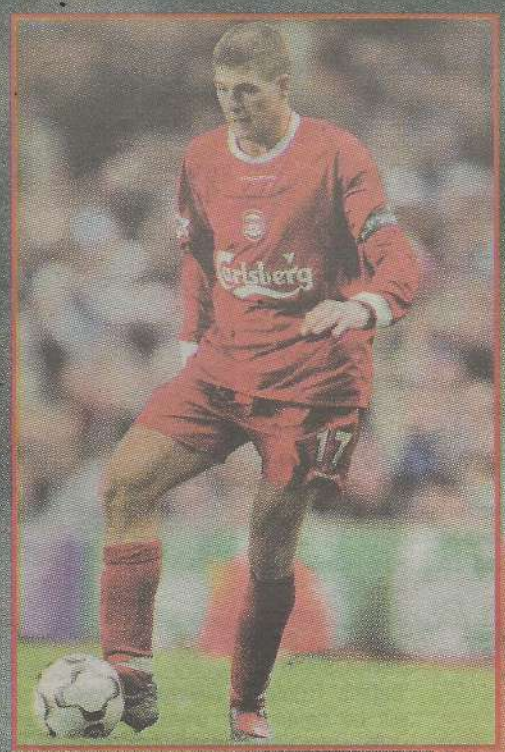
LEADING GOALSCORERS

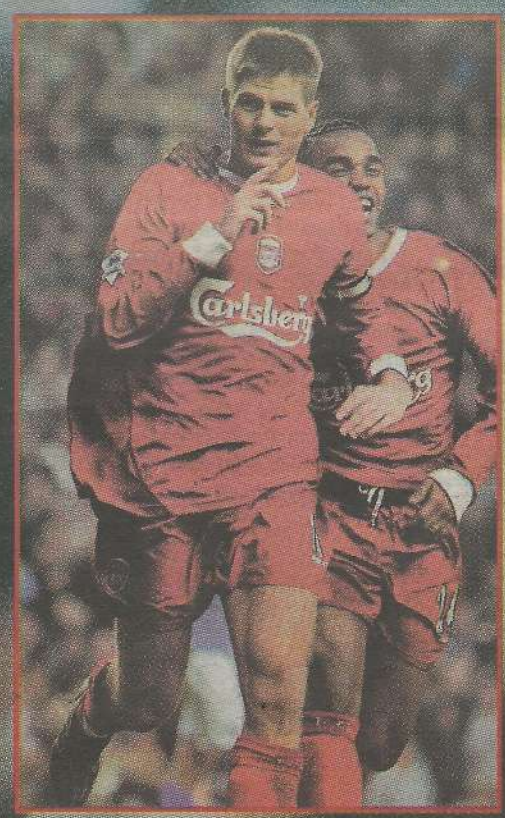
Name	Club	Total
MILICIC Ante	Parramatta	17
MORI Damian	Perth Glory	12
COVENY Vaughan	Sth Melbourne	11
CURCIJA Michael	Sth Melbourne	10
NWAOGAZI Chima	Wollongong Wolves	9
DESPOTOVSKI Bobby	Perth Glory	9
VEART Carl	Adelaide Utd	9
RECH Fernando	Parramatta	8
CARDOZO Pablo	Sydney Olympic	8
MRDJA Nick	Perth Glory	7
PETRIE Stewart	Northern Spirit	7
PONDELJAK Tom	Perth Glory	7
YOUNG Stuart	Wollongong Wolves	7

BYE - SYDNEY OLYMPIC

Superstar Profile #11

Name: Alvaro Recoba
Age: 27
Position: Left Midfielder-Striker
Birthplace: Montevideo – Uruguay
Height: 173 cm
Weight: 68 kg
Team: Inter Milan





Superstar Profile #12

Name: Steven Gerrard
Age: 24
Position: Midfielder
Birthplace: Whinston - England
Height: 6 ft 1
Weight: 69 kg
Team: Liverpool

from the

dressing sheds

by Mark Stavroulakis

DOUMANIS' VISION

NSW Soccer President Tom Doumanis could lead a vision that for so long has been yet a myth to the Australian game.

A proposed second division is in blue-print at the moment for those clubs that fail to qualify for the new re-vamped APL next year.

The Eastern Seaboard league will be the name given to the competition that has gained many interests from various NSL sides.

Marconi, Sydney Olympic, the Brisbane Lions and Gold Coast have stated an interest in entering the competition, and there's also been talk of a few other 'big names', that could jump on the bandwagon spearheaded by Doumanis.

This by no means is a break-a-way league alla the Super League v the NRL, but it will do something for the game that should have been put in place for quite some time.

Promotion and relegation will only strengthen the league's competitiveness and will give all teams an incentive to play well in every match.

A verdict on this issue will come into fruition in the next couple of days – its about time someone's put their foot down on this issue.

'SIX-STAR' BROTHEL SPONSORS AUSTRALIAN CLUB

Heidelberg United, who play in Victoria's state league in Melbourne, have fallen on hard times and successfully approached a local brothel for sponsorship.

"They basically approached this establishment. They said, "you helped out a netball team, can you help us?'" Gotham City manager Angelo Corcasio told Reuters on Thursday.

Corcasio said the South Melbourne brothel, which he described as "six-star", had also sponsored a senior netball team, motor car racers and kickboxers.

"It's a touchy little area. You've got young kids and mothers at a sporting club," he said.

"If you can help a club out while you are being discreet, I'm sure it's good for the club and you are doing good.

"Our clients are pretty upmarket. It's a six-star establishment."

Heidelberg United president Elias Deliyannis said: "It's a straight-out cash deal. There are no additional services offered, or asked for.

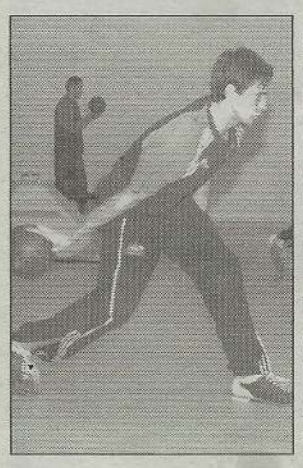
"We're endeavoring to expose their business in a tasteful way," he added in Thursday's Herald Sun newspaper.

"We have a lot of children registered with our club and we realize this has to be dealt with in a sensitive way.

"There definitely won't be signs at the ground or on our shirts."

The newspaper said the former National Soccer League club had sent out a sponsorship letter which asked fans to "support the girls who support us".

OKON GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN



Bowled Over: Paul Okon will not rest on his laurels and will fight his way back into the Socceroo squad.

Its been the first time in as many years the Socceroo squad brought out a list with no Paul Okon written down as a player in the touring party.

Currently playing in Belgium's second division, Okon's had a tough past season's since his move from England to Italy.

The former Belgium Player of the Year stated that he will be back and that he will fight for his spot in the squad once more.

No-one can doubt Paul's ability as a player.

He has been ridiculed in the past but the Australian's last few friendly matches saw a much improved Okon pulling the strings in the heart of Australia's midfield.

One things for sure, a new skipper will be dawning for the Green and Gold – Moore, Schwarzer or Kewell???

ADELAIDE UTD CAN MAKE GF - KOSSIE

Adelaide United coach John Kosmina says the arrivals of Fred Agius and Michael Brooks have lifted the team ahead of the top 6 finals campaign.

"They have definitely made an impact on and off the field and that's what we were looking for," he told *The Advertiser*.

"We were very disappointed after the Perth loss and we did speak about that as a group. The passion is back and the feeling reminds me of what we had at the start of the season when we were buzzing.

"We took that attitude into the match against South Melbourne and we had one of our best wins of the season.

The win against Melbourne Knights was satisfying for other reasons but you could see the players were back in their groove.

This is the closest team I have been involved with since my time at Sydney City and that is saying something. There are no hidden agendas and everybody plays for team.

"The spirit is fantastic and we have some great characters in the side, although some are quiet like Freddy Agius. They are just a great bunch."

He added, "I can see no reason why we couldn't make the grand final.

"Fourth place is nice but we can't be satisfied and I don't think we are. As a group we have to ask ourselves, how much can we get out this season, what else can we do to make the season even more successful?"

GOUTZI 'THE DESTROYER'

Ask anyone that was present at the fierce match-up between Olympic and Marconi and they will tell you that Olympic's George Goutzioulis' tackle on Joe Spiteri will go down as being one of the ugliest seen in the NSL to date.

Spiteri, through his experience decided to slow the game down and went straight to one of the corner flags of his opposing side.

'Goutzi' followed and losing his patience due to the on-going's of the game, put up a two-footed lunge on the former Socceroo.

A pretty sight, I think not, it surely awarded George the best tackle of the year award.

Olympic have stated that they will fine the former South star and have already made plans to release him. George has since returned to Melbourne.

DIOMIS - OLYMPIC'S BEST REFEREE

Sydney Olympic last Wednesday night were dealt a massive blow when they went crashing out of the top six race thanks to a penalty from Olyroo star and former Olympic player Nick Carle. One man that was certainly the talking point of the match was referee Con Diomis who in Blues coach Peter Papanikitas' mind was labeled as a 'disgrace'.

Having turned down Olympic a penalty decision three minutes after Nick Carle slotted in the only goal of the match, both fans, players and the coach were furious at what was to be the final outcome of the match.

"That was the worst refereeing performance I have seen at this level - and I've been coaching for 20 years," stated 'Paps' to 'The Australian', last week.

Known for handing out a fair few cards during any NSL match, Diomis certainly won't be on any Olympic fans Christmas list come end of the season.

SOCCEROOS BACK ON SBS TELEVISION

The upcoming international friendly matches between the Socceroos and the national football teams of Venezuela and South Africa will both be broadcast LIVE and EXCLUSIVE on SBS Television.

In their first international for 2004, the SOCCEROOS will take on VENEZUELA at the Olympic Stadium in Caracas. The match will be broadcast LIVE and EXCLUSIVE on SBS on Thursday 19th February at 9.30am AEST.* A full match replay will be screened that evening at 10.00pm (All Centres)

Olympic officials and fans were furious at various decisions made by referee Con Diomis.

The second match in 2004 for Frank Farina and his squad will take place in London against SOUTH AFRICA. The match between the SOCCEROOS and the 'Bafana Bafana' will be broadcast LIVE and EXCLUSIVE from London on SBS on Wednesday 31st March, at a time TBC.

These broadcasts will be the first Socceroo matches to be featured on SBS since the national team's triumphant win over England in February 2003. Both matches will feature commentary by SBS' SIMON HILL and former Socceroo CRAIG FOSTER; and will be hosted from SBS' Sydney studios by SBS Head of Sport LES MURRAY and former Socceroo captain JOHNNY WARREN.

"It is just on one year since SBS' last involvement with the Socceroos - that historic win over England at Upton Park. It's good to be back, in the hope that we bring the boys similar luck. We are pleased to be again associated with the game on a domestic level, especially in this brave new era of its development," stated SBS Head of Sport, LES MURRAY.

NOHRA ON THE MEND

NSW Premier League side Bankstown City Lions captured a mighty coup two weeks ago by signing three Sydney United players till the end of the Premier League season.

Andy Papoulias has had the pleasure of attaining the services of Sean Babic, Milan Bosnar and exciting midfielder George Nohra, who all gained their releases from the NSL club after wanting out of their ordeal at the Sydney United Sports Centre.

22-year-old Nohra, was fighting to get his release from the club and was lucky to have pulled it off allowing him to pursue his playing career with the Lions.

Bankstown City Lions new midfield whiz George Nohra.

The skillful star has already stated that at the end of the NSW Premier League season, Asia and Europe will be the destination this skillful master will venture off to.

Rest assured Jensen Park will be full of buzz and excitement thanks to these new recruits.

photooftheweek

A recent PEPSI commercial showed that the world game certainly has the high profile in promoting a product, shown above are just some of the stars that have made the new Pepsi commercial so appealing - any one familiar shown in the photo above?

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE

Sensational season for the Saints just keeps rolling on

St George Saints	3
Bankstown City Lions	1

By Paul Goodwin

Visitors Bankstown City Lions looked the part early in the game at St George Stadium on Saturday night, racing to the lead.

Yet as the game wore on they struggled to contain a well disciplined St George midfield.

Although the Saints went into the game with a 100 per cent home record things looked a little precarious for them when Bankstown took the lead.

Cristian Cevenini showed 'plenty of toe' on the flank

In the 11th minute Marc Hoenselaars did well to find Matt Borg on the left, just at the byline and Borg went very close to opening the scoring as he found the side netting with a fierce shot.

A minute later a superb, long-range strike from the Lions' new signing, George Nohra, gave the visitors a shock, early lead.

While the Lions were looking hungry, Cristian Cevenini was showing plenty of toe down the left flank for the Saints and, having already threatened once or twice before the visitors took the initiative, soon sent a rasping shot just over the bar in the 15th.

Bankstown continued to look dangerous, however, as Borg rattled the base of the left post with a deflected shot from close range in the 25th, after cutting back inside from the left to make some space for himself and then firing in a good attempt on goal.

Ricardo Patrizi, back in the St George goal, was a relieved man when the ball went safely out for a corner. He had not looked comfortable before the shot went wide of the target.

At the other end, in the 29th, the in-form and motivated former Bankstown man, Raphael Bove thumped the bar with a shot from the edge of the box; but moments later the Saints were handed a penalty by referee Nick Asargiotis when Bove again made strides into the box and was upended by a combination of Robbie Gomez and Richard Luksic.

The foul conceded looked unnecessary, as Lions' coach Andy was to Papoulias lament after the game.

"It was soft. There was no need for that kind of tackle and I was very disappointed to see us squander our lead in that way. In fact all the goals we gave away today were soft," he said.

Bruno Beddoni made no mistake from the spot and the score was level once more. Bankstown attempted to wrest control back by surging forward impatiently and their supporters were in good voice, urging them on to better things.

But the breaks would not go their way after the penalty had been converted and they gradually allowed the Saints to gain the upper hand.

Borg tested Patrizi again in the 31st minute with a low shot from the edge of the box as the game continued to swing from end to end.

It was that kind of a game. Both sides wanted to score and of the two the visitors were the more deadly attackers.

Unfortunately, with Hoenselaars operating in midfield and Babic and Borg up front, they lacked enough real ball winners in the middle to service the strikers and the more tenacious Saints were able to hold sway more and more as the game progressed.

A free kick for the Saints from Gabriel Mendez, on the left in the 35th, led to the Saints taking the lead just when the game was hanging in the balance.

The resulting header came from Ante Deur, but the ball had first hit the foot of the post, with the rebound being tucked away, unwittingly, by a defender trying to clear.

Not long after this a good build-up on the right saw Simon Verrender get a header in at the centre of the goalmouth, which could have killed the game off earlier, but it cleared the bar easily and the Lions received a real huge let-off.

In the 47th minute Deur got away down the right, sent over a pin-point cross and Cevenini, in the box, shot well, but keeper Josevski somehow managed to push the ball onto the bar and over for a corner. It was the kind of save that can keep a team in the game and launch another come back. But it never happened.

In a swift counter attack on the right, in the 49th minute, Sean Babic got past the last defender well, but when Patrizi came out the shot from Babic was blocked by a defender on the line, Dean Culina doing the work to clear to safety when real danger threatened.

Recent acquisition George Nohra proved his worth with a 'superb' goal and some valuable midfield play

As the Lions continued to look for a goal to get back in the game they left themselves exposed at the back and should have been punished.

Bruno Beddoni, unselfishly, offloaded to Bove in the 61st, but the attempted chip by the former Bankstown player just cleared the bar.

Tempers frayed on the benches and referee Asargiotis had to calm down both coaches following an incident involving Mendez and Paul Wearne. Wearne earnt a caution in the company of Vince Savoca, who got his admonishment just moments after reappearing on the scene from the bench, following a long lay-off.

The issue was sealed in the 73rd, when Bove got past Steve Liavas on the right and cut the ball back from the byline for Watkins to turn in at the near post.

After receiving the ball with his back to goal the one-time Northern Spirit striker then sent a cleverly placed shot past a surprised Josevski. It was a quality strike and showed the skills of a seasoned marksman.

In the end the Saints won comfortably, but it had been a good game for the large crowd on a balmy night.

The Saints were jubilant, but the Lions were left to rue their misfortune, and some shoddy work that allowed St George to maintain their perfect home record.

Beddoni didn't give the Lions a chance

They should not be too hard on themselves. Few teams can keep up St George at the moment and Bankstown gave it their best shot.

Many of the visiting players were angry with themselves after surrendering the game, but that may be doing St George an injustice.

St George maintain a vice-like grip on the top of the ladder and look harder and harder to dislodge. Maybe the second round will change that.

ST GEORGE SAINTS 3
(B Beddoni 29' pen, A Deur 35', D Watkins 73')
BANKSTOWN CITY LIONS 1
(G Nohra 12')
at St George Stadium, Rockdale

ST GEORGE SAINTS: Ricardo Patrizi, Simon Verrender, Dean Culina, Mirko Jurilj, Adrian Webster, Ante Deur (Vince Savoca 68), Raphael Bove, Gabriel Mendez (C), Cristian Cevenini, Bruno Beddoni (Lewis Gekis 77), Daniel Watkins (James Kovas 83)
Sub not used: Phil Weston (RGK), Kosta Lagoudakis
Coach: Manny Spanoudakis

BANKSTOWN CITY LIONS: Zlatko Josevski, Paul Wearne, Richard Luksic (C), Geoff Dwyer, Steve Liavas (Milan Bosnar 75), Matthew Presello, Robert Gomez (Dimitri Nicolaou 52), George Nohra, Marc Hoenselaars (Robert Mileski 55), Sean Babic, Matt Borg
Subs not used: RGK Ivan Kovacevic, Phil Hartshorn
Coach: Andy Papoulias

Referee: Nick Asargiotis
Assistant Referees: Jim Nikolaou and Nikola Radic
Fourth Official: Sandro Perticarini
Yellow Cards: St George: Vince Savoca 70, Simon Verrender 80; Bankstown: Matt Borg 35, Paul Wearne 70

WRITERS: Greg Stock, Paul Goodwin
PRODUCTION: Mary Quartly
EDITOR: Dylan Welch
EDITOR-AT-LARGE: Adam Mark
PHOTOGRAPHY: Carlos Furtado
● *All information is courtesy of SOCCER NSW*

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Penrith and the elusive net

By Greg Stock

Penrith missed their chance to consolidate a top five spot against a ten-man Parramatta Eagles outfit, held to a 1-1 draw at Melita Stadium on Sunday night.

Eagles defender Matthew Clowes was shown a red card in the 39th minute, after a two footed tackle on Luke O'Connell earnt the ire of referee Ray Issac.

Despite leading the match 1-0 at that point, the Panthers were unable to turn their numerical advantage into goals, finding any number of ways to bomb a succession of second half chances.

Given way too much latitude in the midfield the home side were always a threat on the break, scoring a well taken equaliser in the 63rd minute when Andy Kane threw himself head first into the path of a Nathan Rivera corner to beat Chad Taylor at the near post.

"We had a billion chances to win this game but just couldn't come up with anything positive," said Panthers coach Tony Rasmussen.

"Full credit to Parramatta, they kept coming at us and deserved their equaliser.

"Our guys just couldn't find the net in the second half and that for me was disappointing."

Winger Allan Wawi confirming his star is rising with a strong game, scoring the Panthers only goal in the 37th minute.

Picking the ball up on the halfway line, he beat Mark Reveley and Matthew Clowes with his pace, cut inside to beat Ben Delicata and hit a left foot shot on the outside of his foot from the edge of the penalty box to beat a diving Peter Munsie.

While the Premier League competition has seen many fine individual goals this season, Wawi's effort was simply breathtaking, and he went on with the job in the second half setting up three good chances with sheer pace down the left hand side.

"He had a slow start to the season but he is firing on all cylinders and his goal today was just brilliant."

The Panthers were lucky to survive when goalkeeper Chad Taylor was forced into an acrobatic save five minutes from time, tipping a fierce drive from Rivera over the bar. At the other end Danny Hinton and Jason Connolly were unable to convert two one on one chances in the dying minutes.

"One of those late chances goes in and we get the three points," said Rasmussen.

"Two extra points at this stage of the season would have been handy, but we'll learn from that and bounce back.

PARRAMATTA EAGLES 1
(A Kane 63')
PENRITH PANTHERS 1
(A Wawi 37')
at Melita Stadium, South Granville

PARRAMATTA EAGLES: Peter Munsie, Mark Reveley, Matthew O'Shea, Matthew Clowes, Andy Kane (Paul Down 74'), Vic Costabile (Rod Hutchinson 55'), Michael Debono, Nathan Rivera, Ben Delicata, John Kelso, Luciano Berbis (Daniel Borg 55');
Coach: Trevor Morgan

PENRITH PANTHERS: Chad Taylor, Ryan Noble, Malcolm Meilak, Allan Wawi (Jason Sciberras 79'), Jason Connolly, Luke O'Connell, Chad Lewis, Roger Galayini (Danny Hinton 88'), Daniel McCann, Paul Marosevic (Daniel Wells 89'), Luke Boyd;
Coach: Tony Rasmussen.

Referee: Ray Isaac
Assistant Referees: Damien Wanstall and Gareth Askham
Fourth Official: Nick Drackakis

Spirited Star halts the Rockdale charge

Rockdale City Suns	1
Sydney Crescent Star	1

By Greg Stock

Rockdale's spot in the top three - and its four game winning streak - came to a disappointing end when held to a 1-1 draw by Crescent Star in a spirited match on Saturday night at Seymour Shaw Park.

The Suns finished the match with ten men after Nick Orlic was given an early shower by referee Matthew Breeze ten minutes from time for allegedly swearing.

The incident sending the vocal home fans over the edge, jeering Breeze at the conclusion of the match after a tough, physical and often spiteful contest.

The visitors opened the scoring on the half hour when Michael Cindric climbed high at the back post to put the faintest of touches on a Yavus Ekinci free kick.

Capitalizing on some slack defending in the first half, they opened up the game to put the Suns under some real pressure on a number of occasions.

In the 35th minute they were unlucky not to be awarded a penalty after Orhan Dincer crashed to the turf in a tangle of arms and legs with Harry James, but referee Breeze thought better of it and waved play on, much to the disappointment of the seething Crescent Star fans.

While the first half was all Crescent Star, the second was all Rockdale and with a half-time shellacking from coach Ivan Petkovic ringing in their ears they came out strongly, tightening up the space in the midfield and controlling the flow of the game.

The spider-like frame of goalkeeper Vaneja Ivesa kept Rockdale at bay with a string of quality saves until Tony Ju tried his luck from 25 yards in the 70th minute.

In acres of space he received a pass from James, swinging quickly onto his left foot to smash a shot into the top right corner that almost ripped a hole in the back of the net.

For Crescent Star, Cindric, Uhur Tokdoman and substitute Askin Oygur ruffled a few feathers on the Suns forward line adopting a brutally physical method of keeping their opponents in check.

The mood was replicated by Joe Moric and Nick Orlic at the other end of the park - sensibly Breeze only handed out three yellow cards - but could have filled his book as the pressure cooker atmosphere of the fans spilled over onto the pitch.

Rockdale Coach Ivan Petkovic was more disappointed with his teams innocuous first half than the sending off of Orlic.

"We spoke about our game plan to restrict Crescent Star all week at training and then on game day we forget all about it and we got punished," he said.

"We had a good talk about it at half-time and I had to make some positional changes early in the second half and we started to play a lot better.

"The sending off of Orlic was regrettable and a player of his experience should have known better."

His counterpart Yasin Ozdenak was somewhat disappointed, pointing to the Dincer incident as the turning point of the match.

"If that penalty was awarded we'd have gone 2-0 up and then it's a different ballgame," said Ozdenak.

"Our defence was excellent tonight and we did exceptionally well in the second half when under immense pressure."

ROCKDALE CITY SUNS 1
(T Ju 70')
SYDNEY CRESCENT STAR 1
(M Cindric 30')
at Seymour Shaw Park, Miranda

ROCKDALE CITY SUNS: Peter Trajcevski, Tony Ju, Joe Moric, Nick Orlic, Richard Piesa, Denis Alilovic, Peter Apolevski, Steve Dimitrievski (Tony Sekulic 52'), Harry James (Patrick Carrera 79'), Ante Moric, Goce Trposki (Daniel Kukucka 52').
Coach: Ivan Petkovic.

SYDNEY CRESCENT STAR: Vaneja Ivesa, Terry Atsas, Orhan Dincer (Hakan Sevgin 81'), Yavus Ekinci (Philip Marzec 75'), Joe Bruni, Uhur Tokdoman, Daniel Willoughby, Tolgay Ozbey, Evangelos Petratos, Anthony Hartshorn, Michael Cindric (Askin Oygur 55').
Coach: Yasin Ozdenak.

Cautions: Ozbey (scs) 31' Cindric (scs) 43' Alilovic (rcs) 90'
Red Card: Orlic 80'
Referee: Matthew Breeze
Assistant Referees: Leo Romero and Adrian Tamplin
Fourth Official: Sam D'Imperio

Blacktown on the up-and-up as Berries bomb

Blacktown City Demons	4
Canterbury-Marrickville	1

Blacktown City moved ominously into the top three for the first time this season, disposing of a disappointing Canterbury side 4-1 at Henson Park on Sunday evening.

The win came at a cost, however, with midfielder Simon Catanzaro taken from the field in the 12th minute after dislocating his shoulder, after falling awkwardly from a challenge with David Harding.

"It was definitely our best performance of the season so far," said Blacktown City Assistant Coach Nick Bilbija.

"Apart from our last fifteen minutes when we became complacent we controlled the game and made the most of our opportunities which is pleasing."

Three goals in the first ten minutes of the second half set up the win after Luke Roodenburg had given the visitors a 1-0 lead after twenty minutes. He pounced on a long throw from Damien Foxe to lob an advancing Bob Catlin from a tight angle.

Catlin did not have one of his better games when he gifted Blacktown winger Tony Faria a goal in the 48th minute, spilling the ball when he hit the ground after seemingly holding a Paul Urlovic strike.

The ball popping into the path of Faria to tap it into an empty net.Faria followed that up when he laid on a defence splitting pass for Dominic Magill to successfully go one on one with Catlin for goal number three.

Two minutes later Roodenburg was able to scramble a header in traffic and find the net for his second and the Demon's fourth. Despite struggling to make any inroads on the scoreboard, the Berries did show some fight and at 1-0 down had two good chances to make a game of it.

David Harding missed a shot from a mere six yards when he skied a right foot strike under pressure, before Kyriazopoulos had his header tipped over the bar from an acrobatic John Crawley just short of the break.

The home side was unable to find the net until the 73rd minute when Steve Karavatakis used his speed and skill to bust open the Blacktown defence, before piling on some late pressure and laying siege to their opponents goalmouth for the last fifteen minutes of the game.

"I don't feel we deserved the scoreline," said Canterbury coach John Sentas.

"Apart from that ten minute period early in the second half we were competitive and in the last fifteen minutes we came right back into it and probably should have scored once or twice."

While Blacktown celebrated the win, their coaching staff was more concerned over the shoulder injury to Catanzaro. The wily midfielder landed on the point of his shoulder after a challenge to Harding, spending Sunday night under observation at Westmead Hospital.

"At this stage the damage to the shoulder won't be known for a day or two, until the swelling reduces," said Bilbija. "We expect there to be some ligament damage, but whether there is any broken bones we are not sure."

The frustration was evident as the Berries game slipped away from them

C'BURY-MARRICKVILLE 1
(S Karavatakis 73')
BLACKTOWN CITY DEMONS 4
(L Roodenburg 20'/55', T Faria 48', D Magill 53')
at Henson Park, Marrickville

CANTERBURY-MARRICKVILLE: Bob Catlin, Sasa Utjesenovic, Ben Price, Cormack Begley (David Gardiner), Paul Bourke, David Harding, Steve Karavatakis, Aheleas Kotsopoulos (Andy Amegashie), Achileas Markopoulos, John Kyriazopoulos, Stuart Banks (Alan Picken).
Coach: John Sentas.

BLACKTOWN CITY DEMONS: John Crawley, Dane Hokin, Damien Foxe, Ben Willard, Patrick Gatt, Marcus Phillips, Kain Rastall, Simon Catanzaro, Luke Roodenburg, Dominic Magill, Antonio Faria.
Coach: Brian Brown.

Referee: Nick Asargiotis
Assistant Referees: Greg Leadbeater and Robert Susz
Fourth Official: Craig Anderson

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Shock loss shows no end in sight for terrible Tigers

A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt Tigers	1
Central Coast United	3

By Paul Goodwin

A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt tumbled to their fifth loss of the season when humbled 3-1 by Central Coast at Lambert Park on Sunday.

An evenly-contested first half did not give any indication of the action that would take place in the second, as cloud cover provided some relief for the players from the sapping heat that prevailed in the opening stanza.

In what many saw as a very poor performance the Tigers fell behind to a Nathan Byrn goal early in the second period and never really recovered.

It was not the best way to bring the first half of the season to and end, but the Tigers have not been looking too good for a while now and the bottom-of-the-ladder Coast exposed them badly.

Even allowing for Central Coast's better form away from Pluim Park, the result must come as a shock to most.

But from the moment that United took the lead one sensed that A.P.I.A. might struggle to claw their way back into the game.

Central Coast should have taken the lead in the 21st minute when Peter Haynes worked his way into the A.P.I.A. penalty box but his weak shot from eight yards failed to hit even the side netting.

A.P.I.A. were awarded a free kick ten minutes later, but Paul Bilokapic's shot was well smothered by Mathew Trott in the Central Coast goal.

Shortly after A.P.I.A. were awarded a corner on the right hand side and a cleverly-worked move saw Norman Tome cross to Bilokapic, but the tall man's shot was pushed around the post by the agile Trott.

A.P.I.A. came out more resolute in the second half and Central Coast continued their tactic of defending deep and looking for route one to goal.

In the 50th minute it paid dividends for them when Nathan Byrn, who had come on at half time, managed to wrest control from Damon Langan and leave Brad Swancott stranded in the A.P.I.A. goalmouth before opening the scoring.

The scores were levelled in the 58th minute when A.P.I.A. were awarded a free kick on the edge of the Central Coast penalty area.

After the initial shot had hit the wall, Paul Dee was on hand to send a pin-point cross to Norman Tome and his bullet-like header offered Trott no chance.

The goal opened the game up again and chances fell to both sides before another long ball found Langan under pressure again and his half clearance went direct to Peter Haynes, who lobbed the advancing Swancott to restore United's lead.

In the 85th minute, A.P.I.A. thought they had equalised, but Robbie Stanton's goal from a free kick was ruled offside by referee Alex Spiroski.

With time running out and A.P.I.A. pushing forward, United worked their way down into the corner before playing inside to the advancing Doug West and his curling shot easily beat Swancott.

In the end it was the younger Central Coast side who finished the stronger to over-run a disappointing A.P.I.A. who are only a shadow of the side that took all before them in the Finals' series last year.

For A.P.I.A. coach Les De Celis it was another cruel loss at home and he admits that he is at a loss to explain the loss of form in recent weeks.

"I know we are focused and training is competitive but we can't seem to bring that form into the weekend matches.

"It seems whichever way we turn, at the moment, we find another way to drop points.

"I was disappointed with our back-our today, because we continually pushed higher up the pitch and United's direct approach meant we had to keep back-pedalling under pressure."

"There is no simple solution for us, other than getting the basics right again,

That's where we are letting ourselves down," he said.

"The strength of the United team," said Coast coach Jim Foley, "is that they work together and for one another, respecting each other's contribution.

"A.P.I.A. is a squad choc-full of talent and to beat them today shows the determination of this United Squad.

"Peter Haynes was a consistent worker in the game and it was great to see him personally rewarded with the goal that put us back in front."

The starting line-up was essentially dictated by Dave Brewer being injured and Aaron Binskin being unavailable. As Sean Matthews was unable to attend training this week it was necessary to start him off the bench and provide him as a vital substitute in the second half.

Coast captain Marc Falzon was full of praise for his squad who have trained hard all week and who, despite some difficult losses, have never given up and never shirked their task, being competitive and tough each and every week.

Falzon praised the performance of first grade debutants Tom Quilty and Matthew Mitchell for their gritty and solid performances which were not only instrumental in the win but also in lifting the performance of the whole side.

A.P.I.A.-LEICHHARDT TIGERS 1
(N Tome 60')
CENTRAL COAST UNITED 3
(N Byrn 53', P Haynes 65',D West 90')
at Lambert Park, Leichhardt

A.P.I.A.-LEICHHARDT TIGERS: Brad Swancott; Paul Dee, Robbie Hooker, TonyTesoro (David Barrett 55), Damon Langan (C), John Paul-Boutros, Paul Bilokapic, Robbie Stanton, James Monie. (Tony Alilovic 65), Zlatko Arambasic, Norman Tome.
Subs not used: Stewart Vella (RGK), Nathan Moulds
Coach: Les De Celis

CENTRAL COAST UNITED: Matthew Trott, Mitchell Daley, Phil Wurth (Sean Matthews 46), Daniel Surridge, Beau Busch, John Bennis,. Peter Haynes, Tom Quilty (Nathan Byrn 46), Doug West, Marc Falzon (C), Matt Mitchell (James Subat 80)
Sub not used: RGK Ben Xerri, Terry Dries
Coach: Jim Foley

Yellow Cards: A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt: Nil; Central Coast: Nil
Referee: Alex Spiroski
Assistant Referees: Jim Barnes and Steve McAuley
Fourth Official: Bryan Seymour

Eagles pull out of dive

By Paul Goodwin

Light has appeared at the end of a long tunnel for Bonnyrigg with a draw against the in-form Belconnen Blue Devils

Recent showings, including a close 2-1 defeat at home at the hands of Blacktown and a previous 3-0 loss at Bankstown, when all the goals came in the last twenty minutes, indicated that under Gordon Brown the new-look White Eagles are beginning to show more steel.

The White Eagles' home record has always been awesome and Belconnen have never done well on the turf at the Serbian Centre.

When ace marksman Daniel Macor gave the visitors the lead early in the second half, after a very tight first period, it looked as if the hoodoo might be coming to an end.

But Bonnyrigg's own curse of losing seven straight was also a record the home side was keen to put behind them and, thanks to the nippy Aaron Burgess, they were able to equalise and press hard for a winner towards the end.

That the winner never came was disappointing for the vocal home supporters, but the relief at the end of the game was palpable; one more precious point was in the bag and the slow and steady climb up the ladder may at last be starting to happen.

The game turned a little sour towards the end, when players from both sides were sent off for dissent, one angry, it seemed, at his own poor form, while the other objected to a tackle made on him right near the end of the game.

Bonnyrigg tightened things up the at the back, right from the start, with Tayfun Devrimol returning from a mid-season trial in Turkey.

In the opening period Belconnen had more of the ball than their struggling opponents and there was good play from Alex Castro, who was giving some good service to Daniel Macor.

Castro also put in some good crosses, with one in the 35th minute finding Nic Purdue, but the midfielder could only head the ball over the bar.

Belconnen had to take more of a back seat after this, as the home side at last began to get moving.

In the 25th the White Eagles began to create some chances, with Sam Larocca lifting his side and setting Aaron Burgess and Jim Aschner off on good runs.

But the two highly credentialed Bonnyrigg strikers found it tough to break through the tight Belconnen backline, which was well marshalled by Lee Pietrukowski.

Half an hour into the game and with Belconnen completely dominating the midfield and Alex Castro threatening all the time, it just seemed a matter of time before Belconnen would break the deadlock.

That is what happened in the 44th minute when a defensive blunder by White Eagles' defender Mark D'Alessandro, who miskicked a clearance straight to the waiting Macor, allowed the Blue Devils' striker to find himself one-on-one with Cem Akilli and made no mistake to give his side a useful 1-0 lead at half time.

In the second period Bonnyrigg began to show promise early, with Burgess breaking a few times, but were unable to make Belconnen keeper Tony Giannasca earn his keep.

'Dangerous' Daniel Macor

The lack of confidence by the out-of-form local strikers was clear to see, but there was no unwillingness to take shots at goal, Jimmy Aschner trying hard in the 53rd minute, but firing well wide and Burgess lively throughout.

After the 55th minute Belconnen were happy to sit back and defend and take the three points back to Canberra with only a few attacking plays by Mike Katz and the ever dangerous Macor.

Of course Bonnyrigg was by now becoming desperate for a goal and coach Gordon Brown made some changes, with Dejan Malenica coming on for Jimmy Aschner and George Radmanovic coming on for Alex Canak.

In the 75th minute these changes paid quick dividends with an attacking run down the left by Radmanovic and an ensuing pin-point cross finding Aaron Burgess who placed the ball well beyond the reach of the flailing Giannasca.

As the game began to wind down, Malenica broke into the box, but could only shoot well over the bar. Burgess also tried the same, but the Belconnen defence managed to hold on comfortably at the finish.

Macor was dismissed by referee Greg Leverton after reacting to a tackle, as stoppage time loomed, while Fred Umlil, about to be replaced in the 80th minute, vented frustration at his poor showing and earned the card for an outburst.

This meant that Burgess would be replaced by a defender rather than leaving the side one man short in that area.

Bonnyrigg are now perhaps on the way back while Belconnen continue to show stubborn resistance against their opponents.

BONNYRIGG WHITE EAGLES . . .1
(A Burgess 75')
BELCONNEN BLUE DEVILS 1
(D Macor 44')
at Serbian Centre, Bonnyrigg

BONNYRIGG WHITE EAGLES: Cem Akilli, Mark D'Alessandro, Sam Larocca, Tayfun Devrimol (C), Devrim Huseyin, Greg Collins, Alex Canak (George Radmanovic 61), Fred Umlil, Shane Knight, Aaron Burgess (Fernando Pellegrino 80), Jimmy Aschner (Dejan Malenica 61)
Subs not used: (RGK) Ali Akbal, Milorad Simonovic
Coach: Gordon Brown

BELCONNEN BLUE DEVILS: Tony Giannasca (C), Lee Pietrukowski, Adrian Dowling, Toplica Popovich, Oscar Zamora (Anthony Galliozzi 69), Alex Castro, Elliot Zwangobane, Nic Purdue, Ilija Prenzoski, Mike Katz, Daniel Macor
Subs not used: Jimmy Carr (RGK), Matt Valeri, Scott Conlon, Andy Williams
Coach: Chris Tanzey
Referee: Greg Leverton
Assistant Referees: Atilla Stibinger and Richard Keep
Fourth Official: Ernie Horvath
Red Cards: Bonnyrigg: Fred Umlil 80; Belconnen: Daniel Macor 89
Yellow Cards: Bonnyrigg: George Radmanovic 76; Belconnen: Ilija Prenzoski 22

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FIRST GRADE RESULTS & TABLES

Rockdale City Suns 1
(H Ryeol Ju 70')

Bonnyrigg White Eagles 1
(D Macor 44')

St George Saints 3
(B Beddoni 29' pen, A Deur 35', D Watkins 73')

A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers 1
(N Tome 60')

Canterbury-Marrickville 1
(S Karavatakis 73')

Parramatta Eagles 1
(A Kane 63')

Sydney Crescent Star 1
(M Cindric 32')

Belconnen Blue Devils 1
(B Beddoni 29' pen, A Deur 35', D Watkins 73')

Bankstown City Lions 1
(G Nohra 12')

Central Coast United 3
(N Byrn 53', P Haynes 65', D West 90')

Blacktown City Demons 4
(L Roodenburg 20'/55', T Faria 48', D Magill 53')

Penrith Panthers 1
(A Wawi 37')

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	Pts
St George Saints	11	8	2	1	23	8	15	26
Belconnen Blue Devils	11	6	3	2	23	14	9	21
Blacktown City Demons	11	6	1	4	19	13	6	19
Rockdale City Suns	11	5	3	3	16	14	2	18
Penrith Panthers	11	5	2	4	13	16	-3	17
Parramatta Eagles	11	3	5	3	15	13	2	14
Bankstown City Lions	11	4	2	5	20	19	1	14
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	11	4	2	5	14	16	-2	14
Sydney Crescent Star	11	3	3	5	13	14	-1	12
Canterbury Marrickville	11	3	2	6	11	19	-8	11
Central Coast United	11	3	1	7	11	23	-12	10
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	11	2	2	7	10	19	-9	8

GRADE 20 RESULTS & TABLES

Rockdale City Suns 3
(K Miric 27'/87', S Najdoski 33')

Bonnyrigg White Eagles 4
(D Malenica 3', A Dizdaric 39'/56', M Wood 88')

St George Saints 0

A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers 2
(A Ndiaye 48', R Restuccia 72')

Canterbury-Marrickville 0

Parramatta Eagles 2
(N Chahda 38', O Narvaez 84')

Sydney Crescent Star 1
(A Kir 41')

Belconnen Blue Devils 2
(M Valari 21', D Brouwer 93')

Bankstown City Lions 1
(R Iredale 44')

Central Coast United 1
(B Murrell 35')

Blacktown City Demons 1
(J Trifiro 68')

Penrith Panthers 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	D	Pts
Parramatta Eagles	11	8	1	2	26	6	20	25
A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	11	8	1	2	26	10	16	25
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	11	7	2	2	24	16	8	23
Penrith Panthers	11	6	1	4	21	15	6	19
Bankstown City Lions	11	5	3	3	14	19	-5	18
Blacktown City Demons	11	5	1	5	18	18	0	16
Belconnen Blue Devils	11	4	4	3	14	14	0	16
Central Coast United	11	2	4	5	17	18	-1	10
St George Saints	11	3	1	7	12	19	-7	10
Canterbury Marrickville	11	3	1	7	15	27	-12	10
Rockdale City Suns	11	2	3	6	14	29	-15	9
Sydney Crescent Star	11	1	2	8	12	22	-10	5

NEXT ROUND 12

FIRST GRADE

HOME TEAM		AWAY TEAM	DATE	KICK-OFF	GROUND
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	v	Rockdale City Suns	Sat. 21st Feb.	7.00pm	Serbian Centre
St George Saints	v	Belconnen Blue Devils	Sat. 21st Feb.	7.00pm	Mackay Oval
Blacktown City Demons	v	Penrith Panthers	Sat. 21st Feb.	7.00pm	Gabbie Stadium
Central Coast United	v	Parramatta Eagles	Sat. 21st Feb.	7.00pm	Pluim Park
Sydney Crescent Star	v	A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	Sun. 22nd Feb.	6.00pm	Lidcombe Oval
Canterbury-Marrickville	v	Bankstown City Lions	Sun. 22nd Feb.	5.00pm	Henson Park

GRADE 20

HOME TEAM		AWAY TEAM	DATE	KICK-OFF	GROUND
Bonnyrigg White Eagles	v	Rockdale City Suns	Sat. 21st Feb.	5.00pm	Serbian Centre
St George Saints	v	Belconnen Blue Devils	Sat. 21st Feb.	5.00pm	Mackay Oval
Blacktown City Demons	v	Penrith Panthers	Sat. 21st Feb.	5.00pm	Gabbie Stadium
Central Coast United	v	Parramatta Eagles	Sat. 21st Feb.	5.00pm	Pluim Park
Sydney Crescent Star	v	A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers	Sun. 22nd Feb.	4.00pm	Lidcombe Oval
Canterbury-Marrickville	v	Bankstown City Lions	Sun. 22nd Feb.	3.00pm	Henson Park

LEADING GOALSCORERS

As of Sunday 15th February 2004

9 Matthew Borg (BCL),
8 Daniel Macor (BBD),
7 Ilija Prenzoski (BBD), Bruno Beddoni (SG),
5 Jason Connolly (PP), Daniel Watkins (SG), Norman Tome (AL),
4 Anthony Galliozzi (BBD), Paul Urlovic (BCD), Ben Deighan (RCS), Denis Alilovic (RCS), Ben Delicata (PE), Aaron Burgess (BWE), Luke Roodenburg (BCD),
3 Sean Babic (BCL), James Kovas (SG), Goce Trposki (RCS), Marc Falzon (CCU), Simon Catanzaro (BCD), Tony Ju (RCS), Ante Deur (SG), Dominic McGill (BCD), Nathan Byrn (CCU),
2 Sam Larocca (CMO/BWE), Hakan Sevgin (SCS), Filip Marzec (SCS), Manny Papageorgiou (BWE), Zlatko Arambasic (ALT), Demitri Nicolaou (BCL), Robert Mileski (BCL), Yavuz Ekinci (SCS), Alex Asanovic (BCL), James Monie (AL), Marcus Phillips (BCD), Roger Galayini (PP), Vic Costabile (PE), Daniel McCann (PP), Orhan Dincer (SCS), Aheleas Kotsopoulos (CMO), Peter Haynes (CCU), Steve Karavatakis (CMO)

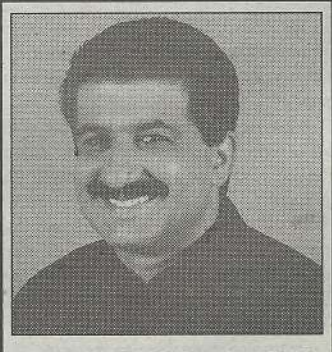
NSW PREMIER LEAGUE TIPPING COLUMN

PAUL GOODWIN
SOCCER NSW JOURNALIST
BONNYRIGG
DRAW
BLACKTOWN
CENTRAL COAST
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
CANTERBURY

Points = 23

TARYN ROCKALL
NSW SAPPHIRES CAPTAIN
ROCKDALE
ST GEORGE SAINTS
BLACKTOWN CITY
PARRAMATTA
DRAW
BANKSTOWN

Points = 22



ANDY PASCHALIDIS
ELITE SPORTS TRAVEL
BONNYRIGG WE
ST GEORGE SAINTS
PENRITH PANTHERS
PARRAMATTA EAGLES
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
BANKSTOWN

Points = 25

GREG STOCK
SOCCER NSW JOURNALIST
ROCKDALE
ST GEORGE SAINTS
PENRITH PANTHERS
PARRAMATTA EAGLES
A.P.I.A. LEICHHARDT
BANKSTOWN

Points = 25

'PEANUTS'
THE MONKEY
ROCKDALE
ST GEORGE
BLACKTOWN
CENTRAL COAST
CRESCENT STAR
CANTERBURY

Points = 23

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ROUND 12 PREVIEW

WITH PAUL GOODWIN & GREG STOCK

Bonnyrigg White Eagles vs Rockdale City Suns

Saturday 21st February at Serbian Centre
Kick-off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

Both sides could only manage draws last weekend, but in vastly different circumstances.

But both are running back into form now and this one could certainly go either way.

Bonnyrigg will fancy their chances in what is a traditional derby game. The lack of out-and-out strikers may cost Rockdale dearly.

The White Eagles have more going for them up front than the Suns, perhaps, once Jimmy Aschner and Aaron Burgess start to click, which could happen at any time.

A more stable Bonnyrigg could at last break through for a much needed win here which could launch them into a second-half season revival.

Rockdale themselves are in the midst of a revival of their own and will not want to drop any points.

This is a game they will want to win, of course, but given the nature of Bonnyrigg's situation and the derby flavour we can easily see this one being all tied up at the finish.

Fred Umlil will miss the game after being sent off by Greg Leverton last Saturday night.

He is sure to be missed, but the defence does look a lot more stable than it has for some time, despite the quick departure of Matthew Percy who only lasted one game.

Gordon Brown's task is to get his side more settled and confident and he will be loathe to make changes unless it is absolutely unavoidable.

A big crowd is expected at The Serbian Centre for this one and it could have a profound affect on the competition as a whole.

St George Saints vs Belconnen Blue Devils

Saturday 21st February at Mackay Oval, Batemans Bay
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

St George's Ivan Zelic, who missed the Bankstown game due to a prior commitment in Canberra will be back, one week fitter after his successful debut off the bench against Blacktown.

Vince Savoca, who made an exceptional return to fitness early, getting his name on the team sheet and coming on from the bench for half an hour against the Lions, will also be in contention.

Belconnen will be without the suspended Daniel Macor for this crucial clash. On this game may well depend the Premiership.

Given that the Saints have a 100 per cent home record at St George Stadium it is a real risk for them to sacrifice that advantage to play this game here at Mackay Oval, Bateman's Bay.

But if it is a gamble their sponsors, fans and players are all supporting the event, one which ought to do wonders for spreading the word about the game. Many who intend to travel south of the city to take in this game will anticipate a great contest. We all hope they are not disappointed.

The rural setting for this game favours neither side and the Saints' proud home record will be under severe pressure. Uncertainty about the surface and surroundings, as well as doubts about which of the two sides the local fans will favour are also going to be a factor.

Here then is a chance for the southern town to see the likes of ace marksman Bruno Beddoni in action, thirty goals in less than two seasons for St George and a host of goals in the colours of AP.I.A. and Rockdale.

Central Coast United vs Parramatta Eagles

Saturday 21st February at Pluim Park
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

Anybody thinking that the Coasties season was over at the halfway point of the season had better think again.

Jim Foley's boys took A.P.I.A. apart at Lambert Park last week to move off the bottom of the table for the first time in six weeks.

The surprising statistic for United is that all of their three wins this year have come in away matches, against Blacktown City, Canterbury-Marrickville and A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt.

At home they lost all four games, a worrying trait that they will be determined to fix.

The Eagles will travel to the Coast without the services of defender Matthew Clowes who was sent off for a reckless tackle on Penrith's Luke O'Connell. His spot will probably go to Daniel Borg with coach Trevor Morgan likely to go back to a 3-5-2 system with Borg playing sweeper.

Morgan may also push new signing Rod Hutchinson into the starting eleven for Andy Kane who is in doubt with an ankle problem.

The away form of the Eagles is quite solid with three draws from four starts and despite the Coasties record of two wins in their last four games, the visitors will start as favourites.

In nine visits to the Coast, the home side is yet to record a win over the Eagles, with just three draws the closest they have come.

Overall the Coasties have won just twice in eighteen league meetings and on figures alone face a tough task of upsetting Parramatta this week.

Blacktown City Demons vs Penrith Panthers

Saturday 21st February at Gabbie Stadium
Kick-Off 7.00pm First Grade / 5.00pm Grade 20

This local derby has always had an impressive reputation of producing some fierce battles and with Penrith's star on the rise this season, it looks likely a new chapter is about to written.

The Panthers have not beaten their neighbours in nine attempts, the closest result being a 1-1 draw at Gabbie Stadium last season with coach Tony Rasmussen predicting fireworks this week as his side looks to settle an old score.

"In our first three matches this season we were touched up by three B's – Blacktown, Bankstown and Belconnen," said Rasmussen.

"They were the only three teams to have taken the stick to us and the boys were quite down on themselves.

"We pencilled these three games as an opportunity to redeem ourselves and with a spot in the top three on the line this week the boys will be pumped and looking forward to giving it their all."

To add a little more spice to the occasion is the close friendship that both Rasmussen and Blacktown coach Brian Brown enjoy, and a few former Demons players in the Penrith side that would like to prove a point to their former employer.

"It should be quite a contest. There is a lot riding on this game and with both teams angling for the top five it is certainly going to be willing," said Rasmussen.

With the loss of Catanzaro, their most able playmaker, Blacktown are going to have to work twice as hard to keep the eager Panthers from creating an upset in what will be a fiery match for all.

Sydney Crescent Star vs A.P.I.A. Leichhardt Tigers

Sunday 22nd February at Lidcombe Oval
Kick-Off 6.00pm First Grade / 4.00pm Grade 20

After going through a midseason crisis in which they netted just three points from six matches, the real Crescent Star stood up to be counted against Rockdale last weekend.

Their first half was sensational and with another cameo performance from Yavus Ekinci they were unlucky not to get something from a game they probably could have won.

The only injury concern for coach Yasin Ozdenak will be defender Michael Cindric, who hobbled from the field early in the second half with an ankle problem, with the tall frame of Askin Oygur pencilled in this week as his likely replacement.

Just whether A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt can bounce back from what must have been a debilitating loss to Central Coast is anybody's guess.

A number of the Tigers squad just don't seem to be consistently performing and it could just be a matter of time before coach Les De Celis looses patience completely and take the axe to a side that has lost two of it's last three games.

The change that has been witnessed in the A.P.I.A.team over the last three weeks has shown how brittle a teams success can be. From last years Premiers to struggling to stay in top five, A.P.I.A needs this win to get back on track.

The only positive being that despite all their dramas, they are still just two competition points out of the five.

In round one at Lambert Park these two clubs played a highly entertaining contest with Crescent Star winning 3-1.

Canterbury Marrickville vs Bankstown City Lions

Sunday 22nd February at Henson Park
Kick-Off 5.00pm First Grade / 3.00pm Grade 20

This traditional derby at Henson Park could well be one of the best attended games at the famous old stadium this season.

The Lions went down 1-0 to the Berries in the corresponding fixture at Jensen Park and will be bent on revenge.

Many who saw Canterbury beat Parramatta at Melita Stadium, a couple of weeks back, felt that they winged it a bit and since their Henson Park form is nothing to rave about, this derby looks more promising for the Lions than it does for The Berries.

Since their first league meeting in 1991 there have been twenty-four games between these two clubs.

The record stands at 11 wins for Canterbury with 7 draws. After yet another poor showing at Henson Park against Blacktown the visitors will be disappointed if, they too, cannot take something from this game.

But a game against neighbours Bankstown is another matter. It is a local derby that is sure to provide plenty of drama and action with both sides positive about winning.

Andy Papoulias was clearly not happy with his sides defending against St George, but he should look at the midfield first as they failed to come to grips with the Saints.

Will Marc Hoenselaars partner Matt Borg up front, or will he sit in behind his long time strike partner and recent signing Sean Babic?

Canterbury will need to work with what they have and hope that team spirit that carried them to victory at Melita Stadium can be reproduced.

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Continental Cup Kicks Off

By Paul Goodwin

The much anticipated Continental Tyres Cup, the FA Cup style competition organised to fill the void left by the demise of the Waratah Cup, got under way on the weekend.

The action began on Saturday at Cromer Park, where a talent-laden Brookvale Blues from the Manly-Warringah competition took Super League Ryde City apart in a first half that saw the locals lead 1-0, thanks to a goal from former Blacktown City and Warringah Dolphins striker Stuart Cleary.

Ex-Manly midfielder Ross Etherington crossed the ball back in after Ryde keeper, Tony Petrovski spilled a high cross from the left, leaving the ex-Demon Cleary with just the tidying up to do.

Brookvale extended their lead in the 51st when Simon Turner robbed Cleary inside the box, unfairly according to the referee who controversially awarded the penalty.

Another former Blacktown man, Steve Riches, put away the shot. Ryde players officials and supporters protested loudly.

Ryde hit back, however, with goals from Glen Murray in the 56th and an equaliser from Greg Fuchs in the 80th.

The game then moved into extra time. The winner came from Frank Gigliotti who hit an absolute screamer from a full thirty yards into the top corner of the net and Ryde became the first Super League team to bow out in the first of the competition's giant kills.

It was not the best of debuts for new Ryde City coach Jim Harte whose new, young team will certainly take time to gel.

Over at Arlington Oval Super League Dulwich Hill faced First Division Auburn Star and in a tightly contested first half neither side was able to break the deadlock.

By full-time it remained the same and the game went into extra time. Phil Pavela's Auburn from the Second Division looked good - as they did last season - and they were able to match it with Jim Patikas' Dulwich Hill.

In the end it needed a golden goal from a Dulwich Hill defender to settle the issue at an emotion-charged Arlington Oval.

So yet again a relative tall poppy is cut down, this time by a fellow NSW competition outfit.

Macarthur Rams led 1-0 against Balmain at Lynwood Park by half time, before going on to win 3-1 in what was described as a tight match.

Fairfield City Lions put paid to Sydney Cedars 6-1, with the Cedars playing on their own after former partners, The Wanderers, went off on their own again this season.

Western Rage managed to overcome East Coast Magic 4-2, at Popondetta Park, in the following game of the double-header.

In the central west, Bathurst 75 accounted for the strong Gladesville-Hornsby Association side Normanhurst 1-0 at Proctor Park, the side once coached by former Socceroo skipper Paul Wade.

Bathurst's goal came from Kerry Johns in the 27th minute.

At Cromer Manly had the stage to themselves when they took on Gladesville United. They were fortunate to play at 7 pm when the heat had given way to a sea breeze.

Holding a 2-0 half time lead the Dolphins went on to win 6-0 at the finish, with a brace from former Central Coast striker Michael Williams and Roland Webber, with Steve Berry and Phil Moss chiming in with the others.

Then on Sunday a big programme got under way in humid conditions, with several double-headers beginning in mid afternoon.

Those teams playing the early games would have felt the heat, none more so than Super League teams facing district, or lower division, opposition.

The Narellan Rangers- Belmore Hercules game typified the 'David and Goliath' struggle that makes the Continental Tyres Cup competition so exciting. Although Belmore eventually ran away with a five-one victory, the Rangers gave as good as they got as the shots above prove.

The Wanderers, who are going it alone this season after a couple of amicable and enjoyable campaigns shared with the Cedars club, were able to face opponents on their own Fogolar Furlan pitch on Sunday.

They had Roosters FC to contend with, far easier opponents than Cedars faced the previous day, and ran out 4-0 winners.

At Popondetta Park newly promoted Super League side Northern Tigers met Quakers Hill before Mount Druitt entertained Hakoah.

Two second-half goals from Hakoah's new Russian-born recruit Slav Platkov paved the way for the under-dogs to triumph, Second Division beating First Division on this occasion.

Platkov ran at the defence in the 60th minute and unleashed a great strike from 25 yards and then in the 72nd rode some good tackles before simply tucking the ball inside the right post.

It was a good performance by the defenders of Hakoah in steamy conditions against a strong opponent.

Earlier Northern Tigers managed to subdue Quakers Hill with Matt Godwin giving the 'Super League' Tigers the lead in the 42nd minute.

Further goals from Gary Hurtwitz, in the 50th and from Matt Mesiti, in the 81st, ensured the Tigers of a Second Round game, despite coach Fred Mesiti being without six of his regular players on a very oppressive afternoon.

Two sides from the far south-west were in action early in the afternoon at the rustic Arlington Oval.

Narellan took on Belmore Hercules in the heat and dust of the famous old Constitution Road bowl, where new Belmore coach Ross Anton was keen to make an early impression, while Stanmore played host to Camden Tigers in the later kick off.

Stanmore emerged 2-1 winners but not before having to fight back from a goal down.

Belmore, by contrast, had a much easier passage.

After George Iliopoulos had given them a lead and George Magiannis had doubled it, Jim Melissourgos made it 3-0 before the break.

Melissourgos netted again in their second period and to wrap things up - after Narellan had scored one themselves - Con Psarologos made it 5-1 near the end.

Jensen Park also saw some double-headers. The General, Peter Sarikakis, was to take his Hurstville City Minotaurs' boys into battle against Western Branch before district teams Pagewood and North Sydney came to grips. But the Western Branch side pulled out, mercifully for the Minotaurs, given the heat.

Up the road at Lidcombe Oval the West Pymble side from the Ku-ring-gai and District Association locked horns with the Lidcombe Waratahs, Granville's finest.

This game gave way to the highly anticipated clash of the intriguing Sydney Dwarfs and Super League regulars, MSC Liverpool.

Many went along to see this game out of interest and perhaps to see if the kebabs were as good as they are when Crescent Star play at the ground.

The Dwarfs played a highly entertaining brand of football and raced to a third-minute lead courtesy of a superb individual strike from the left by Paa Nn Codgoe, but soon after scoring that fabulous opening goal the dynamic striker had to leave the field with a groin strain.

MSC fought their way back and aided by some sloppy Dwarfs' defending they managed to get to the lead within 34 minutes with a brace from Scott Southall.

When Frederick Graham was sent off for the Dwarfs for retaliation midway through the second half, following a foul on the edge of the Liverpool box, MSC were able to race to a 4-1 lead.

Substitute Sacha Drca scored one from the penalty spot after a blatant hand ball in the 58th and two minutes later hit a fine individual strike to set his side on the road to victory.

Mohammad Mansaray reduced the deficit with eleven minutes to go, but hopes of a Dwarfs revival with ten men were dashed when a booming shot from Jova Novakovic made it 5-2 and wrapped the game up completely for the Super League side.

The Dwarfs had given a great account of themselves, however, and would prove worthy opponents for any high quality side with their talented bunch of players.

On this showing they will make ideal opponents for Super League sides needing further trial games in the weeks ahead.

The early game at Lidcombe had seen West Pymble beaten 4-3 by Lidcombe Waratahs but it was the North Shore side that scored first and it was only late in the game that it was put beyond West Pymble's reach.

Cook Park Mount Pritchard was the setting when another KDSA side, Asquith, got to test their mettle against NSW First Division outfit White City, but the First Division side proved relatively easy 3-1 winners.

Later Hurstville ZSC met Mount Pritchard for the first time since the former gained Super League status and these old foes would have enjoyed the chance to meet up again.

This time the typically tight affair we have come to expect from these two clubs once again took place with the game being settled by a golden goal 1-0 from a wicked deflection well into the second period of extra time.

Liverpool Bossy and Nepean at Ernie Smith, won 2-1 by the home side and UNSW and Doonside Hawks at David Phillips were also games to savour, with the latter game resulting in a 5-1 win for the students.

There was also some interest in Wollongong United's first game under the coaching of Bill Pilovski when Hills Brumbies travelled to the south coast.

The United team earned a Second Round tie with the Northern Tigers following their tough 2-1 win at Macedonia Park.

Another Gladesville-Hornsby outfit, Epping-Eastwood Tigers, were in action at Schofields against the NSW First Division side coached by Stan Ackerley.

Epping Eastwood gave a great account of themselves, hitting the lead at the 80 minute mark through Mark Lewis and it was not until two minutes from time that Shane Cevenini was able to put the Scorpions level again.

Once the game moved into extra time, Dean Southern soon put paid to Epping-Eastwood with a 94th minute winner and that was the end of the glory trail for the Northern Suburbs outfit.

Other big winners on the weekend included West Pennant Hills-Cherrybrook. 2-1 over Trasandinos, Blacktown Association 3-2 over Southern Star Sharks and Prospect United 3-2 over Dunbar United.

Greystanes, Gymea, Greensland, Sydney University and Earlwood Wanderers all progressed comfortably into the Second Round next weekend.

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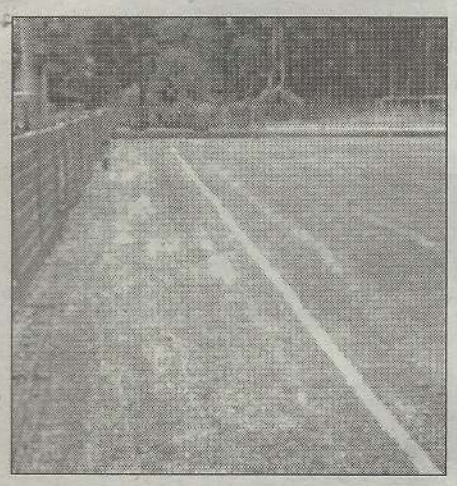

Pet Picks Pat

Rockdale City Suns coach Ivan Petkovic has added former Parramatta Power youth player Patrick Carrera to his squad. Carrera missed out on a start with a National league club this season after undergoing ankle surgery. Petkovic swooped on the talented midfielder and also plans to add another two or three players to his squad before the transfer window closes.

"We have a tough draw over the next few months and I feel we need to add a few names to round out the squad," said Petkovic.

Goalkeeper Trinity Allen is expected to sign early this week as back up to Peter Trajcevski.

Batemans Bay

Just a reminder that the top of the table clash between St. George and Belconnen Blue Devils this week is being played at Mackay Park in Batemans Bay.

For Saints goalkeeper Richard Patrizzi, it will be opportunity to play in front of family and friends in a game that is shaping up as a Grand Final dress rehearsal.

"When I returned from England last year I spent a season down at Batemans Bay playing in the local Premier League," said Patrizi.

"While it was a very enjoyable experience it obviously wasn't at the same level as the Premier League and that ultimately was the reason for me coming to Sydney.

"But I still have a lot of good friends and some family in the area and I'm really looking forward to playing in front of them."

Rockdale's pitch: we've got the grounds

Rockdale played their first home game of the season at Seymour Shaw Park on Saturday night and what a game it was.

Despite the disappointment of having defender Nick Orlic sent off the Crescent Star game produced one of the most competitive games this year as well as one of the biggest crowds seen during Premier League fixtures: it had the J.W.Walker Stand bulging.

The pitch was also in magnificent condition after some top dressing and re-turfing work done by the Sharks through the off-season with both camps commenting on the quality.

Lets hope that the Sharks can keep the ground in good condition and not 'overuse' the pitch as they have in previous seasons.

'Evergreen' Pilovski still booming

At 44 years of age, the best playing days of 'evergreen' Bill Pilovski are probably behind him. That's not to say he doesn't pull the boots back on occasionally, the most recent of which was a couple of trial games for his First Division club Wollongong United.

Pilovski led his side against Hurstville City Minotaurs last Friday week and came away with a 2-1 win, the winner coming from an expertly taken free kick from, you guessed it, big bad Bill.

Our 'spy' tells FTS that the freekick was very much of the Zlatko Nastevski variety, where he curled a shot around the wall and into the top left hand corner of the net.

Two days later, in searing heat at Cromer Park, he was at it again, playing sweeper for United against Phil Moss' Dolphins, but this time they weren't so fortunate, going down 5-0.

Only two weeks in the job, the new United coach is wasting no time putting together a very competitive squad for the season ahead.

Four ex-Rockdale players have joined Pilovski in centre-half Malcolm Bideau, defender Nathan Trajcevski, goalkeeper Daniel Farias and striker Robbie Todorovski, while former Sydney University and Sutherland midfielder Steve Karovski is also a recent signing.

Winter transfers

The transfer news in the Winter Super League ranks continues to heat up. Most coaches have been signing smaller than normal squads with the idea of recruiting a number of National League players in the week preceding the start of the season.

Most teams are keeping their first grade playing rosters to a mere fifteen or so players. Of the moves we know about: Stanmore have signed Con Anastasiadis from Bankstown City, Sam Awad and Mohamad Kambal from Western Rage and John Fotiadis from St. George; Hurstville ZSC have signed Eddie Adams from Western Rage, Steve Zoric and Peter Vrlic from Mount Pritchard; while Manly have agreed to terms with former Central Coast and Newcastle Breakers midfielder Michael Williams.

Dulwich Hill coach Jimmy Patikas is expected to put pen to paper with former A.P.I.A. midfielder Ryan Jones this week.

Continental
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Round 2 Fixtures

Home Team	Away Team
WPH/Cherrybrook	Blacktown Association
Wollongong United	Northern Tigers
Gymea	North Sydney
Bathurst '75	Schofields Scorpions
Inter Lions	Greystanes
White City	Belmore Hercules
Macarthur Rams	Prospect United
M.S.C. Liverpool	Brookvale
Hurstville ZSC	UNSW
The Wanderers	Liverpool Bossy
Greenisland	Lidcombe Waratahs
Fairfield City Lions	Auburn Star
Hakoah	Western Rage
Sydney University	Stanmore Hawks
Hurstville City Minotaurs	Manly Warringah Dolphins
National Sports SC	Earlwood Wanderers

Round 1 Results

Date	Home Team	F	A	Away Team	Venue
16/2/04	Southern Star Sharks	2	3	Blacktown Association	William Lawson Park
16/2/04	Trasandinos	1	2	WPH/Cherrybrook	Christie Park
16/2/04	Wollongong United	2	1	Hills United Brumbies	Macedonia Park
16/2/04	Northern Tigers	3	0	Quakers Hill	Popondetta Park
16/2/04	Pagewood	1	5	North Sydney	Jensen Park
16/2/04	Gymea	3	0	Bansktown Sports	Harrie Dening Centre
16/2/04	Schofields Scorpions	2	1	Epping Eastwood FC	CSI Ground
16/2/04	Bathurst '75	1	0	Normanhurst	Proctor Park
16/2/04	Inter Lions			BYE	
16/2/04	Greystanes	4	1	Liverpool City Robins	Freame Park
16/2/04	Asquith	1	3	White City	Cook Park (Mt Prit)
16/2/04	Belmore Hercules	5	1	Narellan Rangers	Arlington Oval
16/2/04	Prospect United	3	2	Dunbar Rovers	William Lawson Park
16/2/04	Balmain	1	3	Macarthur Rams	Lynwood Park
16/2/04	Sydney Dwarfs	2	5	M.S.C. Liverpool	Lidcombe Oval
16/2/04	Ryde City	2	3	Brookvale	Cromer Park
16/2/04	UNSW	5	1	Doonside Hawks	David Phillips Field
16/2/04	Hurstville ZSC	1	0	Mt Pritchard	Cook Park (Mt Prit)
16/2/04	The Wanderers	4	0	Roosters FC	Fogolar Furlan
16/2/04	Liverpool Bossy	2	1	Nepean Association	Ernie Smith Res
16/2/04	Lidcombe Waratahs	4	3	West Pymble	Lidcombe Oval
16/2/04	Gazy Lansvale	0	4	Greenisland	Cherrybrook Oval
16/2/04	Sydney Cedars	1	6	Fairfield City Lions	Popondetta Park
16/2/04	Dulwich Hill	0	1	Auburn Star	Arlington Oval
16/2/04	Western Rage	4	2	East Coast Magic	Popondetta Park
16/2/04	Mt Druitt Town	0	2	Hakoah	Popondetta Park
16/2/04	Springwood	0	3	Sydney University	Summerhayes Park
16/2/04	Stanmore Hawks	2	1	Camden Tigers	Arlington Oval
16/2/04	Gladesville United	0	6	Manly Warringah Dolphins	Cromer Park
16/2/04	Hurstville City Min	3	0	Western Branch	Jensen Park
16/2/04	BYE			National Sports SC	
16/2/04	Western Red Devils	0	4	Earlwood Wanderers	Ernie Smith Res

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Soccer NSW comes home with a swag at the annual NSW Sports Awards

Award-winners from the 2004 NSW Sports Awards (Bill Cullinan and Jim Ronis third and fourth from left)

Soccer NSW was amongst the finalist's at this year's NSW Sports Federation Annual NSW Sports Awards, but unfortunately didn't figure in the winner's category.

In the prestigious 'Organisation of the Year' category, Surf Lifesaving NSW, took out the award with Soccer NSW and Netball NSW runner's up.

In the 'Junior Athlete of the Year Award', NSW Sapphire, Kylie Ledbrook, was a runner-up to Sarah Kemp (Golf) with Torah Bright (Snowboard), Nick Flanagan (Golf).

Referee Matthew Breeze was also a runner-up with Sharon Kelly (Netball) in the 'Official of the Year' category behind the now retired Bill Harrigan (Rugby League).

Long-time soccer administrators, Bill Cullinan and Jim Ronis were both recognised for their over 30 years of contribution to the game at a local and state level with Distinguished Service Award's.

The NSW Athlete of the Year Award was won by 6-time women's world surfing champion Layne Beachley for the second year running. Beachley, who also won in 2002 and previous to that in 2000, beat athletes such as Michael Milton (alpine skier), Jana Pittman (athletics), Peter Robertson (triathlon) and Ian Thorpe (swimmer) to win the highest accolade of the night.

Beachley's win puts her equal with the existing record holder, Ian Thorpe who has won the coveted award three times.

"2003 was a great year for Beachley who retained her ASP World Surfing Title crown for the sixth year in a row – that makes her the sole world record holder for as many consecutive wins," said Mitsie Kent, Executive Officer of the NSW Sports Federation.

Beachley was one of sixteen award recipients at the Sydney Superdome, which included The Penrith Panthers (Rugby League) who were named 2003 NSW Team of the Year.

Alpine skier Michael Milton and Wheelchair Tennis star David Hall were both awarded Athlete with a Disability of the Year, Rugby League's Bill Harrigan has won Official of the Year and Australian of the Year Steve Waugh has received a Special Recognition Award for his contribution to cricket.

The event was attended by a familiar sporting faces including MC Ken Sutcliffe, Alpine Skier Michael Milton and recently retired world No.1 rugby league referee, Bill Harrigan.

Other faces in the crowd included INXS member Kirk Pengilly, who accompanied his long term partner Beachley to the event, Sandra Nori (Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation, Minister for Women) and Ian Armstrong (Shadow Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation).

Canterbury to create girls competition

The Canterbury District last week approved the creation of a Women's and Girl's competition in 2004 in the following age groups: under-10, under-12, under-14, under-17 and Ladies.

The Women's and Girl's Soccer comp will be played on Sunday, with all games grouped at the one venue, which will be rotated through various clubs each week.

The CDSFA will allow junior girls to play in both the Saturday (mixed with boys teams) and Sunday Girl's exclusive competitions. Schools are also being encouraged to enter whole teams in the girls competitions provided the team is registered with an affiliated club.

The district has approved a five year plan which will involve the creation of more age divisions and youth league teams in coming years.

Please contact Elizabeth Sadleir 0414 263 599 or Giles Parkinson on 0418 754 651 for further details.

Soccer Sevens

SSG Chrome 2003-04 Soccer Sevens Champions SSG Chrome won the inaugural Soccer NSW Division One Soccer Sevens competition with an emphatic 2-0 victory over Importz.

In very heavy rain, SSG gained an early lead through a penalty and added another before half-time. Importz were unable to bridge the gap, although they had many opportunities throughout.

In Division Two, Boots N'All defeated Wilson 6-3 in a high-scoring final.

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ITALIAN SERIE A

ITALIAN AFFAIR

By Joe Russo

The Venezuela v Australia game this Thursday morning has an Italian touch with Serie B club Vicenza having their striker, Massimo Margiotta, making his debut for Venezuela.

Margiotta's convocation for Venezuela would hardly have rated a mention except for the fact that he is an Italian who has dual citizenship.

There was no chance of Margiotta actually representing the Azzurri, so when the opportunity to play international football presented itself with Venezuela he took it.

Margiotta was actually born in Venezuela (Maracaibo) but moved to Italy with his Italian parents, who had earlier migrated to Venezuela, when he was little.

Margiotta, who will be 27 years old in July, has actually played for the Italy Under 21 team but under FIFA's new rules, which have also affected Australia's Tim Cahill, he can now play for another country because he has not represented Italy at senior level.

He is a Pescara junior who has played for Cosenza, Lecce, Reggiana, Udinese and his current club Vicenza.

The Margiotta case is rather interesting because there are two more Serie B players, Max Vieri, younger brother of Christian, who is with Napoli and Davide Moscardelli of Triestina, who are eligible to play for other countries.

Italy should not be surprised or upset by this because they have even recently recruited 'foreign' players as Italian.

Last year's case of Mauro Camoranesi, the Argentinian midfielder who plays for Juventus, highlighted this fact. He was a controversial selection for the Azzurri because some argued that he was not a bona fide Italian. However, under citizenship laws he was eligible and Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni selected him.

Camoranesi is the latest example but even past greats of Italy, such as Sivori and Altafini, were not originally Italian. So too was Roberto Di Matteo, the Lazio and Chelsea midfielder of the 1990's, who played for Italy despite being born and raised in Switzerland.

Moscardelli of Triestina has Belgium citizenship and is very keen to represent Belgium given that he too has limited chances with the Azzurri.

Vieri was born in Australia and, according to a newspaper report in Italy, he said that he would love to play in a World Cup for the Socceroos.

Vieri jnr was quoted as saying that he would accept immediately a call up from the Socceroos which is rather interesting given that players seem often to be annoyed at such a call up.

The irony is that Vieri, as a striker, is kept out of the Socceroo team because of Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell who both have been reluctant, either recently or in the past, to play for Australia.

There is no doubt that Kewell and Viduka would be the first two players picked in any Socceroo team but Vieri, given his impeccable pedigree and his form at Napoli, would surely be worthy of a place somewhere in that squad.

There is no doubt that the Serie B is a very strong competition and a player who is doing well there and is willing to play for the Socceroos should not be overlooked.

★ ★ ★ ★

The transfer rumour mill continues and the latest is that AC Milan would love to secure the services of Luis Figo, the Portugal international currently at Real Madrid.

AC Milan, current leaders in the Serie A, are already thinking of next year and a defender, possibly Jaap Stam of Lazio or the brillant youngster Alex of Santos, or even both, could join the club.

Figo was courted in the past by AC Milan and given that David Beckham would easily fill the right midfield role at Real, then the great Spanish club might be more inclined to allow Figo to go to AC Milan.

Figo is still such a talented player and the Serie A would present him with a new challenge. However, AC Milan would have to fight off competition from the English Premier League clubs, including Arsenal, who would also be very interested in Figo.

Alex is the young Brazilian player who in June becomes a free agent and as such will be very hot property. Alex is highly rated and will definitely move from Santos but whether it will be to AC Milan remains to be seen.

★ ★ ★ ★

NSW readers can tune into 98.5 FM on Sunday nights at 10.00pm for all the latest soccer news locally and abroad with myself, Joseph Carlucci, Mark Stavroulakis and Stuart Jones.

ANCONA 0
ROMA 0

Bottom club Ancona, without a win this season, provided the surprise result of the day by holding second-placed Roma to a scoreless draw.

After Antonio Cassano hit the post and Francesco Totti went close with a free-kick, Roma enjoyed much of the possession but could not penetrate the Ancona defence who held on to frustrate Fabio Capello's side.

BOLOGNA 1
MODENA 1

Bologna will be happier with the result after playing most of the match with 10 men after the dismissal of midfielder Leonardo Colucci in the 32nd minute.

Two minutes after Colucci's red card, Bologna took the lead thanks to a deflection in the box that allowed Tomas Locatelli to slot home from close range.

Modena surged forward in the second half and equalised on 64 minutes with a brilliant goal from Nicola Amoruso, who chested down a Nicola Campelli cross before turning and volleying past Pagliuca.

BRESCIA 1
SAMPDORIA 1

Brescia moved a point closer to Serie A safety with a draw against this season's surprise package Sampdoria.

Youngster Andrea Caracciolo gave Brescia a sixth-minute lead, tapping home a Giuseppe Colucci cross, but a superbly struck second-half free-kick by Cristiano Doni gave Sampdoria a deserved point.

INTER MILAN 1
UDINESE 2

After beating AC Milan just before the end-of-year break, Udinese came away with another San Siro victory.

Midfielder Giampiero Pinzi put the visitors ahead seven minutes after the restart with a well-taken drive from 25 metres that slammed off the post and into the back of the net past the outstretched Francesco Toldo.

Dino Fava doubled the lead on 66 minutes with his ninth goal of the season, sliding home a Marek Jankulovski cross, but Julio Cruz pulled a goal back for Inter four minutes later.

The final moments were tense with a Christian Vieri header going just wide, but Udinese held on for an impressive win.

Inter Milan forward Adriano (back) holds onto Udinese defender Nestor Sensini (right) as teammate Per Kroldrup pursues.

JUVENTUS 1
REGGINA 0

Enzo Maresca's second half goal ensured three vital points for Juventus in a low-key game at the Delle Alpi.

Francesco Cozza had the only chance for the visitors when he found himself one-on-one with Juve keeper Gianluigi Buffon but his attempted chip was well read by Buffon.

Just before the break, Juve had an Alessandro Del Piero effort ruled out for handball but the prospect of a frustrating second half diminished when Maresca scrambled the ball home from close range after Marco Di Vaio had headed goalwards.

LECCE 1
AC MILAN 1

A superb 19th-minute free-kick by Uruguayan forward Ernesto Chevanton gave relegation strugglers Lecce hope of beating leaders AC Milan, but Andriy Shevchenko's 17th goal of the season, seven minutes after the restart, earned Carlo Ancelotti's side a point.

The draw ends the European champions' seven-match winning run.

SIENA 1
PARMA 2

Australian Mark Bresciano's stunning drive from the edge of the box in the final minute of play gave Parma a comeback win over Siena.

Veteran striker Enrico Chiesa had given Siena the lead two minutes before the break, firing home a low cross from Nikola Lazetic.

Parma equalised thanks to Alberto Gilardino's close-range effort 13 minutes after the restart. The match seemed headed for a draw until Bresciano picked the ball up deep in his own half, dribbled downfield and firing a shot from the edge of the box that curled into the top right corner to seal Parma's fifth away win of the season.

LAZIO 3
EMPOLI 0

Lazio extended their unbeaten run to four games after cruising to a 3-0 victory over Empoli at the Olympic Stadium.

First-half goals by Fernando Couto and substitute Luciano Zauri followed by a free-kick from Jaap Stam keep Roberto Mancini's side in contention for a Champions League spot despite stringent financial restrictions.

CHIEVO 2
PERUGIA 0

Perugia's miserable season in Serie A shows no signs of improving as they slipped to their 11th defeat of the season as Chievo ensured the Grifoni are still looking for their first win in the league.

Goals from Andrea Barzagli and Federico Cossato in the second half condemned the Umbrians to their latest defeat, which means that they now require an improbable series of victories if they are to retain their top-flight status.

was a crucial win for Chievo though, who have looked sluggish in recent weeks but with this triumph relaunch their bid to secure a place in next season's UEFA Cup.

FIXTURES

Sunday 22nd February

Udinese	vs	Ancona
Modena	vs	Empoli
Milan	vs	Inter
Bologna	vs	Juventus
Chievo	vs	Lazio
Brescia	vs	Lecce
Sampdoria	vs	Parma
Reggina	vs	Perugia
Roma	vs	Siena

SERIE B

Albinoleffe 0 Atalanta 4, Avellino 1 Livorno 1, Bari 0 Treviso 0, Cagliari 3 Palermo 2, Como 2 Ascoli 1, Fiorentina 1 Vicenza 1, Genoa 2 Torino 1, Messina 1 Ternana 1, Piacenza 2 Napoli 3, Venezia 2 Pescara 0, Verona 0 Catania 0.

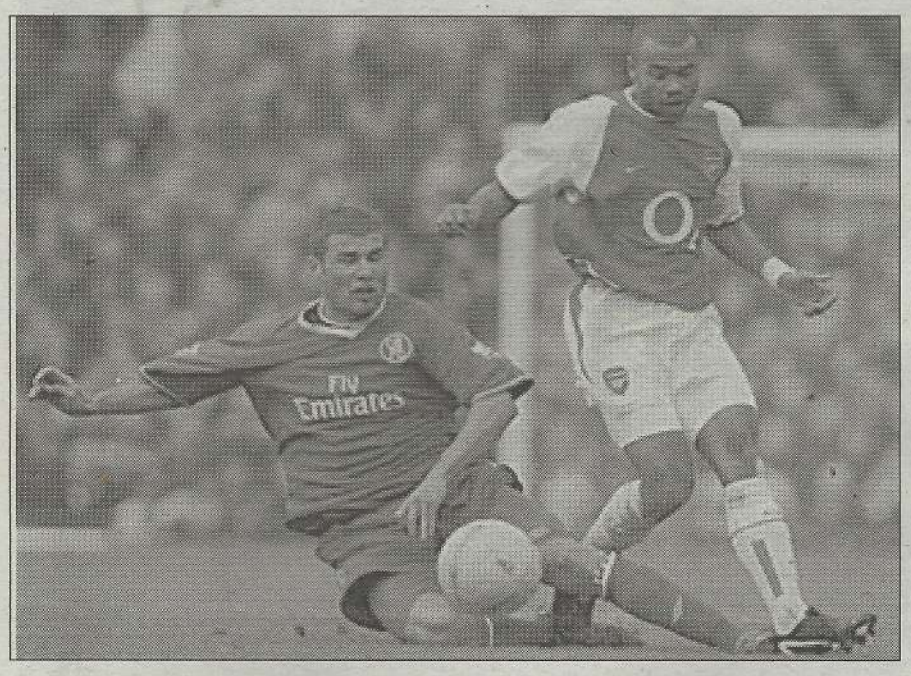
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1.Atalanta	**27**	**12**	**13**	**2**	**37**	**-18**	**49**
2.Ternana	27	13	8	6	39	-26	47
3.Cagliari	27	12	8	7	46	-31	44
4.Palermo	27	11	11	5	37	-24	44
5.Piacenza	27	12	8	7	29	-24	44
6.Messina	27	10	12	5	35	-27	42
7.Livorno	27	9	13	5	33	-26	40
8.Torino	27	9	10	8	37	-31	37
9.Salernitana	26	10	7	9	24	-24	37
10.Catania	27	9	9	9	33	-28	36
11.Triestina	26	9	9	8	34	-34	36
12.Treviso	27	8	11	8	28	-28	35
13.Ascoli	27	8	10	9	32	-33	34
14.Fiorentina	27	7	13	7	30	-34	34
15.Verona	27	7	11	9	33	-35	32
16.Albinoleffe	27	8	8	11	23	-35	32
17.Napoli	27	5	16	6	20	-27	31
18.Pescara	27	7	10	10	21	-31	31
19.Vicenza	27	6	12	9	25	-27	30
20.Venezia	27	6	11	10	23	-30	29
21.Bari	27	6	9	12	28	-36	27
22.Como	27	6	9	12	21	-32	27
23.Genoa	27	5	12	10	23	-35	27
24.Avellino	27	2	12	13	24	-39	18
24.	Avellino	26	2	11	13	23	

SERIE A

Lazio 3 Empoli 0, Chievo 2 Perugia 0, Juventus 1 Reggina 0, AC Milan 1 Lecce 1, Roma 0 Ancona 0, Brescia 1 Sampdoria 1, Inter Milan 1 Udinese 2, Bologna 1 Modena 1, Parma 2 Siena 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1Milan	**21**	**16**	**4**	**1**	**40**	**11**	**52**
2Roma	21	14	5	2	41	9	47
3Juventus	21	14	4	3	43	25	46
4Lazio	21	12	3	6	33	22	39
5Inter Milan	21	10	6	5	36	17	36
6Parma	21	10	6	5	30	25	36
7Udinese	21	9	6	6	25	23	33
8Sampdoria	21	7	9	5	26	24	30
9Chievo	21	8	4	9	25	26	28
10Bologna	21	6	7	8	23	28	25
11Brescia	21	5	9	7	29	33	24
12Modena	21	5	7	9	17	27	22
13Siena	21	5	6	10	28	30	21
14Reggina	21	4	9	8	18	31	21
15Lecce	21	5	4	12	25	38	19
16Empoli	21	4	4	13	15	38	16
17Perugia	21	0	11	10	23	39	11
18Ancona	21	0	6	15	8	39	6

ENGLISH



Chelsea's scorer Adrian Mutu (left) slides in on Arsenal defender Ashley Cole.

ENGLISH FA CUP 5th Round

ARSENAL 2
CHELSEA 1

Jose Reyes lit up Highbury with a brilliant double as holders Arsenal came from behind to beat Chelsea 2-1 and reach the FA Cup quarter-finals.

The Gunners went into the interval with a 1-0 deficit after Adrian Mutu had steered a left-footed shot beyond Jens Lehmann on 40 minutes, but a wonder-goal from new-boy Reyes was the catalyst for a brilliant Arsenal comeback.

Picking up the ball 30 yards from goal, Reyes took one touch before arrowing a thunderous shot into the top right-hand corner of Carlo Cudicini's goal.

The winner was set up by Patrick Vieira, his defence-splitting pass picked out Reyes who fired a low shot into the net, despite John Terry's best efforts on the line.

Chelsea was unfortunate to see Jesper Gronkjaer's 35th-minute header from a Lampard cross disallowed for offside.

LIVERPOOL 1
PORTSMOUTH 1

Liverpool completely dominated their match at Anfield after Michael Owen gave them a second minute lead but the Reds will have to travel to Fratton Park after Matt Taylor's 77th minute equaliser secured a replay for Portsmouth.

Liverpool's goal came after neat build up play by Cheyrou and Gerrard and it was the captain's ball that found Owen in the box and the England striker finished with calm aplomb.

Liverpool then held onto possession consistently but failed to find a second and eventually paid the price when substitute Matt Taylor smashed home after great work by Smertin down the right.

MANCHESTER UTD .4
MANCHESTER CITY .2

Ten-man United ended City's FA Cup dreams by winning a thrilling Manchester derby 4-2 at Old Trafford.

The hosts had Gary Neville sent off late in the first half and then weathered the City storm after the break before easing clear in the closing stages.

Paul Scholes made United's first-half pressure pay before Neville was red carded for headbutting Steve McManaman by striker Ruud van Nistelrooy made it 2-0 on 71 minutes.

That sparked a flurry of goals with Cristiano Ronaldo making 3-0 before Michael Tarnat pulled one back for the visitors.

Van Nistelrooy bagged his second for 4-1 before Robbie Fowler completed the scoring from a quickly-taken free kick.

TRANMERE 2
SWANSEA 1

Tranmere needed to come from behind to see off Third Division Swansea 2-1, after ex-Rovers striker Andy Robinson had given Swansea a 16th-minute lead.

Rovers responded to level with a Ryan Taylor penalty eight minutes later and went ahead in the 59th minute when Iain Hume cut inside and unleashed a fierce shot which Roger Freestone could do little about.

Swansea's hopes of forcing their way back into the game were dashed when Alan Tate was sent off following an incident with Taylor six minutes from time.

MILLWALL 1
BURNLEY 0

Millwall were made to toil by First Division rivals Burnley before eventually prevailing 1-0 at the New Den.

Paul Ifill and Danny Dichio both spurned good chances to open the scoring for the Lions in the first half but that pair continued to cause havoc after the break.

Ifill hit the woodwork in the 57th minute as the Lions again forced the pace. The goal they deserved finally came in the 70th minute when Dichio reacted to an Ifill cross to score.

Burnley were reduced to 10 men soon afterwards when Paul Weller was sent off for violent conduct, and Millwall held on comfortably.

Portsmouth's Linvoy Primus (right) puts in a tackle on Liverpool striker Michael Owen.

FULHAM 0
WEST HAM 0

Fulham were forced to settle for a replay after being held to a goalless draw by London rivals West Ham at Loftus Road.

Carlos Bocanegra hit the post for the home side. But the Hammers were not intimidated - and Marlon Harewood, Brian Deane and Michael Carrick all forced good saves from Edwin van der Sar.

The London rivals will meet again at Upton Park a week on February 24 for the right to join Manchester United and Co in the next round.

SUNDERLAND 1
BIRMINGHAM 1

And there will be a replay needed from the evening game as Sunderland and Birmingham drew 1-1 at the Stadium of Light.

The visitors took the lead just before the half-hour mark with a superb individual goal from Mikael Forssell.

The Finnish striker weaves past three defedners in the box and tucked a low shot past keeper Mart Poom.

But the Wearsiders earned a second bit at the tie after Kevin Kyle headed in an equaliser just before half-time.

They almost grabbed a winner when a deep cross from Steven Wright eluded Maik Taylor but it bounced away to safety off the woodwork.

And in injury time, Birmingham's Aliou Cisse collected two yellows in nine minutes after appearing as substitute.

SHEFFIELD UTD 1
COLCHESTER 0

Famed Cup fighters Sheffield United are also in the quarter-finals after a gritty 1-0 victory over Colchester.

Manager Neil Warnock's side reached the last four of both the FA Cup and the Worthington Cup last season.

And now they face the prospect of another glamour tie after Paul Peschisolido's second-half goal accounted for Nationwide Two Colchester.

The Canadian striker headed home from Alan Wright's free kick just after the hour mark and though Colchester battled to get back into the game, the Blades held on to keep up another great Cup run.

FA Cup Fifth Round Replays
Sunday, February 22
Portsmouth vs Liverpool

Tuesday, February 24
West Ham vs Fulham

Wednesday, February 25
Birmingham City vs Sunderland

FIXTURES

Saturday 28th February

Arsenal	vs	Charlton
Birmingham	vs	Bolton
Blackburn	vs	Southampton
Everton	vs	Aston Villa
Fulham	vs	Man Utd
Leeds	vs	Liverpool
Leicester	vs	Wolverhampton
Man City	vs	Chelsea
Middlesbrough	vs	Tottenham
Portsmouth	vs	Newcastle

PREMIER LEAGUE

No Premier League matches were played due to FA Cup fixtures over the weekend.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	**24**	**17**	**7**	**0**	**47**	**16**	**58**
Man Utd	24	18	2	4	47	20	56
Chelsea	24	16	4	4	44	19	52
Newcastle	24	9	10	5	34	25	37
Charlton	24	10	7	7	32	26	37
Liverpool	24	9	8	7	34	26	35
Fulham	24	10	5	9	36	33	35
Aston Villa	24	9	6	9	28	27	33
Bolton	24	8	9	7	30	36	33
Birmingham	23	8	8	7	20	26	32
Southampton	24	8	7	9	23	21	31
Tottenham	24	9	3	12	31	36	30
Middlesbrough	23	7	7	9	23	27	28
Blackburn	24	7	5	12	35	39	26
Everton	24	6	7	11	28	33	25
Man City	24	5	9	10	32	35	24
Portsmouth	24	6	5	13	28	37	23
Leicester	24	4	8	12	32	46	20
Wolverhampton	24	4	8	12	21	47	20
Leeds	24	4	5	15	19	49	17

FIRST DIVISION

Coventry 0 Norwich 2, Crystal Palace 6 Stoke 3, Ipswich 3 Bradford 1, Nottingham Forest 3 Walsall 3, Watford 2 Preston 0, West Bromwich 2 Cardiff 1, Wigan 2 Derby 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Norwich	**31**	**18**	**8**	**5**	**49**	**26**	**62**
West Brom	31	16	9	6	44	28	57
Wigan	31	14	11	6	44	31	53
Ipswich	31	14	8	9	58	48	50
Sheff Utd	30	14	7	9	45	36	49
West Ham	30	12	12	6	43	30	48
Sunderland	29	13	9	7	38	26	48
Crystal Palace	32	13	8	11	51	46	47
Preston	30	13	7	10	46	37	46
Reading	30	13	6	11	36	40	45
Millwall	30	11	11	8	34	29	44
Cardiff	31	11	10	10	49	41	43
Stoke	31	12	7	12	43	44	43
Coventry	31	9	13	9	38	36	40
Crewe	30	11	7	12	39	41	40
Rotherham	30	9	10	11	36	42	37
Walsall	31	9	10	12	35	42	37
Gillingham	29	10	6	13	33	43	36
Burnley	30	8	10	12	39	48	34
Watford	31	8	10	13	34	44	34
Derby	31	7	10	14	33	51	31
Notts Forest	30	7	9	14	37	41	30
Bradford	32	6	5	21	24	48	23
Wimbledon	30	5	3	22	28	58	18

SECOND DIVISION

Bournemouth 1 Notts County 0, Brentford 1 QPR 1, Chesterfield 2 Rush&Diamonds 0, Grimsby 2 Brighton 1, Peterborough 0 Bristol City 1, Port Vale 1 Oldham 0, Sheff Wed 1 Hartlepool 0, Stockport 2 Swindon 4, Wrexham 1 Barnsley 0, Wycombe 0 Luton 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plymouth	**30**	**17**	**9**	**4**	**65**	**27**	**60**
QPR	31	16	10	5	55	29	58
Bristol City	30	16	10	4	44	22	58
Swindon	31	14	9	8	50	39	51
Port Vale	30	14	6	10	48	42	48
Wrexham	30	14	5	11	36	30	47
Barnsley	31	12	11	8	40	35	47
Brighton	31	13	7	11	43	35	46
Luton	29	12	10	7	44	39	46
Hartlepool	30	11	10	9	45	37	43
Bournemouth	30	11	10	9	34	33	43
Rushden & D'monds	30	11	6	13	49	49	39
Sheff Wed	31	9	12	10	35	39	39
Blackpool	30	11	6	13	37	43	39
Colchester	29	10	8	11	29	37	38
Tranmere	29	8	13	8	33	40	37
Oldham	31	8	12	11	46	46	36
Brentford	31	9	7	15	33	47	34
Chesterfield	31	8	10	13	31	46	34
Grimsby	29	8	9	12	33	50	33
Peterborough	31	6	11	14	35	44	29
Stockport	31	5	13	13	40	53	28
Notts County	31	6	7	18	30	53	25
Wycombe	31	4	11	16	32	52	23

Spanish Primera Liga

Primera Liga leaders Real Madrid scraped a last-gasp 1-1 draw at home to Valencia when Luis Figo converted a controversial injury-time penalty in an intense top-of-the-table clash at the Bernabeu.

Valencia had looked on course for victory after defender Roberto Ayala had put them ahead with a bullet header from a corner 15 minutes from time.

But Figo levelled from the spot three minutes into injury time after Raul went down as he challenged Valencia defender Carlos Marchena for the ball inside the area.

Brazilian midfielder Julio Baptista hit a hat-trick as Sevilla plunged Murcia deeper into trouble at the foot of the Primera Liga in a controversial match 3-1 win that also saw both sides reduced to 10 men.

The Andulacians had won only once away from home before this match but they were inspired to their second victory on the road by Baptista, who scored two penalties and hit a third deep into injury time to complete a memorable treble.

Luis Garcia pulled one back for Murcia, also from the spot, with the score at 2-0.

Real Sociedad and Athletic Bilbao had to share the spoils in an exciting Basque derby at Real's Anoeta Stadium.

FIXTURES

Sunday 22nd February 2004

Espanyol	vs	R Madrid
Celta	vs	Málaga
Racing	vs	Valladolid
Zaragoza	vs	Villarreal
Athletic	vs	Betis
Sevilla	vs	R Sociedad
Albacete	vs	Murcia
Osasuna	vs	Mallorca
Atlético	vs	Deportivo
Valencia	vs	Barcelona

Miguel Angulo (left) of Valencia tussles with Madrid's David Beckham

Francisco Yeste gave Bilbao an early lead only for Nihat Kahveci to hit back for the hosts from San Sebastian in a game where both sides had their opportunities.

Barcelona survived the dismissal of Edgar Davids to beat Atletico Madrid 3-1.

Frank Rijkaard's team now have a four-point lead over fifth-placed Athletic Bilbao and are now in a good position to fulfil their season's aim of qualifying for the Champions League.

Goals from Javier Saviola, Ronaldinho and Luis Garcia gave Barca the win, with Demis Nikolaidis scoring Atletico's only goal in reply.

Davids turned from hero to villain after a superb performance by being sent off for two yellow cards midway through the second half.

Two goals from Victor were enough to see off 10-man Osasuna 2-0 and keep Deportivo La Coruna's title hopes alive.

The midfielder netted in the 22nd minute and then added a second nine minutes before the break as Javier Irureta's men eased to a comfortable victory.

Osasuna are beginning to fade after an excellent start to the season which saw them challenging in the top four, although their cause was not helped by the sending-off of Uruguayan midfielder Pablo Garcia 17 minutes into the second half for serious foul play.

Malaga put an end to their six-match losing run by beating relegation-threatened Espanyol 5-2.

Malaga went in front after 35 minutes when Miguel Angel's right-footed shot found the net after a corner.

It was 2-0 to the home side five minutes later when Manu Sanchez's apparently innocuous shot evaded the clutches of Espanyol goalkeeper Erwin Lemmens.

There then came a riposte from Espanyol when Alberto Lopez headed home Ivan de la Pena's corner, a minute into injury-time at the end of the first half.

Malaga reclaimed their two-goal lead a minute later when Sergio Duda's free-kick picked out Juanito whose finish was precise and clinical before Salva Ballesta made it 4-1 after the break.

There was a second Espanyol goal in the 76th minute to Raul Tamudo however Malaga put themselves out of sight in the 83rd minute when Frederico Insua headed home their fifth goal.

Real Betis remain unbeaten this year after beating Real Zaragoza 2-1.

The opening goal arrived in the second minute when Ruben Cani took advantage of non-existent marking in the Betis penalty area to fire home from close range.

Brazilian Denilson provided the equaliser after 31 minutes after rifling a shot past Zaragoza goalkeeper Cesar Lainez.

Denilson was always a menace and it was his bicycle kick in the penalty area which found Alfonso Perez in space. His close-range finish gave the hosts a 38th minute lead, one they would not relinquish.

Celta Vigo's revival under new boss Raddy Antic continued as they recorded their second straight win to put clear blue water between themselves and the bottom three.

Second-half goals from Alexandr Mostovoi and Jesuli condemned Real Valladolid to their ninth defeat of the season and ensured Celta moved onto 27 points, four clear of the relegation zone.

Villarreal ended a run of three successive losses by beating Racing Santander 6-3 while Albacete moved out of the relegation zone with a 0-0 draw in Mallorca.

Murcia 1 Sevilla 3, Real Sociedad 1 Athletic Bilbao 1, Barcelona 3 Atletico Madrid 1, Deportivo Coruna 2 Osasuna 0, Malaga 5 Espanyol 2, Real Betis 2 Real Zaragoza 1, Real Madrid 1 Valencia 1, Real Mallorca 0 Albacete 0, Valladolid 0 Celta Vigo 2, Villarreal 6 Racing Santander 3.

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	**Real Madrid**	**24**	**16**	**5**	**3**	**46**	**25**	**53**
2	Valencia	24	15	6	3	46	17	51
3	Deportivo	24	15	4	5	41	17	49
4	Barcelona	24	11	7	6	38	28	40
5	Athletic	24	10	7	7	31	28	37
6	Villarreal	24	10	6	8	35	30	36
7	Atlético	24	10	6	8	31	31	36
8	Betis	24	9	8	7	32	26	35
9	Osasuna	24	8	10	6	24	21	34
10	Sevilla	24	8	7	9	34	27	31
11	Real Sociedad	24	8	7	9	30	35	31
12	Racing	24	8	6	10	32	38	29
13	Valladolid	24	7	8	9	28	35	29
14	Málaga	24	9	2	13	33	40	29
15	Mallorca	24	8	4	12	28	42	28
16	Celta	24	6	9	9	34	41	27
17	Albacete	24	6	5	13	23	34	23
18	Zaragoza	24	6	5	13	23	35	23
19	Espanyol	24	6	2	16	22	43	20
20	Murcia	24	2	10	12	22	40	16

German Bundesliga

Werder Bremen beat Kaiserslautern 1-0 to go nine points clear at the top of the Bundesliga after their closest rivals all dropped points.

Brazilian striker Ailton scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot in the final minute.

Werder won a game in the last minute for the third time this season to close in on a fourth German title that would be their first since 1993. The northerners have 48 points from 20 games.

Bayern Munich are second in the table but missed a golden chance to stay in touch with Bremen as, without influential midfielder Michael Ballack, they slipped to a 1-0 defeat at Bochum.

Dane Peter Madsen scored the only goal for the Ruhr Valley club after just eight minutes, and Ottmar Hitzfeld's defending champions could not find an equaliser in the remaining 82.

Stuttgart's title challenge suffered another setback as they drew 1-1 with Borussia Moenchengladbach.

It all looked good for Stuttgart when they took the lead through Imre Szabics in the fifth minute, and

FIXTURES

Saturday 28th February 2004

B.Munich	vs	Wolfsburg
Freiburg	vs	Kaiserslautern
E.Frankfurt	vs	M.gladbach
Hannover	vs	Hertha Berlin
Bochum	vs	Hansa Rostock
Hamburg SV	vs	B.Leverkusen
FC Cologne	vs	1860 Munich
Werder Bremen	vs	B.Dortmund
VFB Stuttgart	vs	Schalke

Werder Bremen's Ailton reacts after scoring the winning goal against Kaiserslautern.

both sides were reduced to 10 men before half-time, with Stuttgart's Boris Zivkovic and Enrico Gaede of 'Gladbach given their marching orders.

The visitors never gave up and Vaclav Sverkos made it 1-1 five minutes from the end.

Bayer Leverkusen came from two down to snatch a point at Hannover, but coach Klaus Augenthaler will still look upon the game as two points dropped as fourth-placed Bayer slipped nine points adrift of Werder.

Clint Mathis and Kostas Konstantinidis put the home side 2-0 in front, but goals from Dimitar Berbatov and Franca snatched a draw for Leverkusen, who at least proved that they still possess plenty of fighting spirit.

Hertha Berlin moved out of the bottom three with a nailbiting 3-2 win at Freiburg, which saw the capital club move into a three-goal lead but two late strikes from Freiburg meant the victory was never certain until the very end.

Arne Friedrich scored midway through the first half and Andreas Neuendorf doubled the lead just before the break to put the visitors in the driving seat but, despite Guiseppe Reina adding a third on 63 minutes, they were made to sweat after a Freiburg fightback.

A Michael Hartmann own goal in the 76th minute gave the hosts hope and Levan Tskitishvili converted an 87th-minute penalty to set up a nerve-wracking finale.

Schalke stepped up their bid for a UEFA Cup place with a 2-0 win at bottom club Cologne.

Nico Van Kerckhoven gave the visitors from Gelsenkirchen the lead after 26 minutes and then Michael Delura scored his side's second of the match, nine minutes before full-time.

In between the two Schalke goals, Cologne had frequently threatened their opponents' goal and they will doubtless feel cheated not to get anything from this match.

Hamburg increased their chances of a European spot by beating Wolfsburg 2-0.

Goals from Sergej Barbarez in the 16th minute and Christian Rahn two minutes from time enabled Klaus Toppmoller's men to leapfrog their visitors in the Bundesliga and in doing so record their third win in five Bundesliga matches.

Eintracht Frankfurt remain second-from-bottom of the Bundesliga after a late equaliser from Hansa substitute Magnus Arvidsson denied them a precious win.

Arvidsson struck eight minutes from time, just when it appeared as though the home side were bound for their fifth victory of the campaign.

Eintracht had held their slender advantage from the 39th minute when Brazilian defender Chris gave them the lead, but much to the frustration of their supporters they were unable to hang on.

Ewerthon's penalty, following a foul on him by Martin Stranzl who was subsequently sent off, helped Borussia Dortmund earn a 2-0 win at 1860 Munich.

Stranzl committed a rash professional foul on the Brazilian in the 40th minute and Ewerthon converted from the spot.

He then grabbed the second goal just short of the hour mark to seal the away win for Matthias Sammer's side.

Werder Bremen 1 Kaiserslautern 0, 1860 Munich 0 Borussia Dortmund 2, Hamburg 2 Wolfsburg 0, Stuttgart 1 Moenchengladbach 1, Freiburg 2 Hertha Berlin 3, Eintracht Frankfurt 1 Hansa Rostock 1, Hanover 2 Bayer Leverkusen 2, Bochum 1 Bayern Munich 0, Cologne 0 Schalke 2.

		P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Bremen	20	15	3	2	52	21	48
2	Bayern	20	11	6	3	44	22	39
3	Stuttgart	20	11	6	3	27	9	39
4	Leverkusen	20	10	6	4	37	22	36
5	Bochum	20	9	6	5	33	23	33
6	Dortmund	20	9	4	7	35	28	31
7	Schalke	20	8	7	5	26	23	31
8	Hamburg	20	7	6	7	28	33	27
9	Wolfsburg	20	8	1	11	37	39	25
10	Hannover	20	6	6	8	36	44	24
11	Freiburg	20	7	3	10	28	44	24
12	Hansa Rostock	20	6	5	9	29	31	23
13	1860 Munich	20	6	5	9	20	29	23
14	Moen/ngladbach	20	5	5	10	20	28	20
15	Hertha	20	4	7	9	19	39	19
16	Kaiserslautern	20	6	3	11	22	34	18
17	Eintracht	20	4	5	11	20	31	17
18	Köln	20	4	4	12	16	29	16

WORLD

Scottish Premier League

Aussie and Hearts star Patrick Kisnorbo (R) evades a challenge from Hibs Scott Brown

Celtic came from behind against Dundee United with two late goals to extend their lead over Rangers at the top of the Bank of Scotland Premier League to a commanding 13 points - and equal a 40-year-old British record in the process.

Shaun Maloney and Chris Sutton's rescue act stretched their winning league run to 23 games to match Morton's feat in 1963-64 and the Hoops have now, surely killed off Rangers' increasingly slim title hopes.

Alan Archibald's 60th-minute opener had given Dundee United hope of a shock victory but Celtic's late rally soon extinguished any hope the Tangerines had.

Rangers needed a late goal to salvage a point in a 1-1 draw against Aberdeen as their quickly fading title challenge all but ended at Pittodrie.

A Frank de Boer header in the 87th minute cancelled out Alexander Diamond's second minute goal, stealing victory from an impressive Dons team.

Aberdeen took the lead after a Scott Morrison free-kick dropped into the Rangers six yard box and Alexander Diamond was well positioned to scramble the ball home.

Livingston put the depression of administration behind them for 90 minutes at least as they cruised to a comfortable 3-1 win over Motherwell at Almondvale.

Goals by Jamie McAllister, Derek Lilley and David Fernandez gave the home side a commanding three-goal half-time lead.

Two goals in a three-minute spell saw Kilmarnock fight back from behind to take all three points from Partick at Rugby Park.

Stephane Bonnes gave bottom side Partick the lead shortly after the interval, but their joy was short-lived when Killie hit back with goals from David Lilley and Kris Boyd in quick succession.

A Noel Hunt goal after 32 minutes was enough to help Dunfermline claim three points at the expense of downtrodden Dundee.

The Dark Blues struggled throughout and only looked a danger after the arrival of Mark Fotheringham in the second half.

Derek Riordan's curled effort shot Hibernian into a first-half lead but Hearts came back in the second period after Stephen Pressley tucked away a penalty and it finished 1-1.

Before the Edinburgh derby Derek Riordan claimed it had always been a boyhood dream to score against Hearts and the young Hibs star made it reality as he struck a fine opener at Easter Road.

The match erupted in the second half when Mark de Vries was fouled by Colin Murdock inside 40 seconds for a Hearts penalty.

Stephen Pressley stepped up and levelled to earn Hearts a point at Easter Road.

Aberdeen 1 Rangers 1, Celtic 2 Dundee Utd 1, Dundee 0 Dunfermline 1, Kilmarnock 2 Partick Thistle 1, Livingston 3 Motherwell 1, Hibernian 1 Hearts 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1Celtic	**24**	**23**	**1**	**0**	**77**	**11**	**70**
2Rangers	24	18	3	3	49	19	57
3Hearts	23	12	4	7	32	25	40
4Dunfermline	24	10	7	7	29	33	37
5Livingston	23	7	8	8	27	29	29
6Hibernian	24	7	7	10	24	36	28
7Motherwell	23	7	6	10	26	30	27
8Dundee United	24	7	6	11	24	38	27
9Dundee	24	6	7	11	29	36	25
10Kilmarnock	24	7	3	14	28	52	24
11 Aberdeen	23	5	5	13	27	42	20
12Partick	24	3	3	18	26	47	12

BELGIAN FIRST DIVISION

Christian Wilhelmsson scored the opening goal for Anderlecht in the 2-1 win over Lokeren.

Standard Liege's 1-1 draw with Genk allowed Anderlecht to extend their lead at the top of the Belgian First Division to an almost unassailable 18 points following a 2-1 defeat of Lokeren.

Cedric Roussel's spectacular header gave Genk the lead over Standard Liege before Belgian international Jonathan Walasiak's leveller four minutes before the break.

Anderlecht's Polish defender Michal Zewlakow, however, did decide matters in another victory for the leaders, striking with a superb free kick in the 79th minute.

Earlier Swede Christian Wilhelmsson, back from a two-month injury break, put the leaders ahead on the hour mark, only for Brazilian Tailson to equalise six minutes later.

Champions Club Bruges climbed to third after beating Ghent 1-0 but stay 21 points behind runaway leaders Anderlecht.

Timmy Simons converted a penalty six minutes from time to secure a fourth consecutive win for Bruges, who leapfrogged Excelsior Mouscron after their 1-1 draw at Cercle Bruges.

The champions struggled, however, and Ghent were unlucky not to earn a point when Sandy Martens, who left Bruges in January, hit the post.

A late goal from Mouscron's Marcin Zewlakow snatched a share of the spoils after Kristof Arijs had put Cercle Bruges side ahead.

Antwerp provided the most eventful match of the round, defeating nine-man R. Charleroi SC 3-1 in a battle between the division's basement teams. Charleroi opened the scoring through Adekamni Olufade but Bernt Evens, Patrick Goots and on-loan Manchester United FC striker Arthur Gomez had all replied by the halfway stage of the second period to seal the win. Ibrahim Kargbo and Mustapha Sama were both dismissed for the home team.

Nigerian striker Tosin Dosunmu scored twice and David Paas was also on target as Westerlo thrashed Beveren 3-0 while forward Désiré M'bonabucya also collected two goals in Sint-Truidense 2-1 defeat of Heusden-Zolder.

Elsewhere, Jari Niemi and Marco Casto inspired Mons to a 2-0 defeat of Lierse.

Gent 0 Club Brugge 1, Cercle Brugge 1 Mouscron 1, Lierse 0 Mons 2, Beveren 0 Westerlo 3, Anderlecht 2 Lokeren 1, Antwerp 3 Charleroi 1, Sint-Truiden 2 Heusden 1, Genk 1 Standard Liege 1, (La Louvière vs Germinal Beerschot – Tuesday AEDT).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1Anderlecht	**22**	**20**	**1**	**1**	**57**	**18**	**61**
2Standard	22	12	7	3	41	20	43
3Club Brugge	22	12	4	6	46	23	40
4Mouscron	22	10	9	3	44	28	39
5Westerlo	22	10	7	5	30	25	37
6Genk	22	10	6	6	42	30	36
7Sint-Truiden	22	8	7	7	26	31	31
8Germinal Beerschot	21	7	7	7	20	24	28
9AA Gent	22	6	9	7	22	22	27
10Beveren	22	8	2	12	29	37	26
11La Louvière	21	5	10	6	27	30	25
12Cercle Brugge	22	5	9	8	20	34	24
13Lierse	22	4	11	7	22	27	23
14Mons	22	4	9	9	22	31	21
15Lokeren	22	4	7	11	23	35	19
16Heusden	22	4	6	12	21	37	18
17Antwerp	22	4	4	14	17	45	16
18Charleroi	22	3	7	12	19	31	16

African Nations Cup

Tunisia's Khaled Badra (left) and team captain Riadh Bouazizi (right) hold the trophy aloft after receiving it from the hands of Tunisian President Abedine Ben Ali (centre) after winning the final of the African Cup of Nations.

Hosts Tunisia won the African Nations Cup for the first time, beating Morocco 2-1 to be crowned continental champions almost 40 years after they appeared in their first final.

Ziad Jaziri got the winning goal in the second half, profiting from a bad error by the Moroccan goalkeeper Khalid Fouhami.

He failed to clear a 52nd-minute cross by the Brazilian-born left wing Clayton, just getting a hand to the ball to set it up perfectly for the onrushing Jaziri to tap into the net.

Tunisia's keeper Ali Boumnijel put the triumph down to team spirit.

"We've been together for two years, through good times and bad, and the squad have always held firm, despite any criticism," he said.

"The desire was extraordinary right through to the end."

Tunisia, roared on by an almost capacity crowd at the 60,000-seater stadium, had begun at a frenetic pace and were ahead after just five minutes when Francileudo dos Santos headed in a cross.

Dos Santos, also born in Brazil but whose nationality had been fast-tracked to allow him to play in the tournament, found space between the defenders to loop his header home.

Tunisia should have been further ahead soon after but Dos Santos scuffed an easy chance and Jaziri was flagged offside when he broke away, television replays suggesting the linesman's decision was wrong.

The spurned chances almost proved costly as Morocco rallied to equalise through Youssef Mokhtari, his fourth goal of the tournament a diving header from Youssef Hadji's 38th-minute cross from the byline.

The Germany-based Mokhtari had been a virtual unknown before the tournament and was playing in only his ninth international.

Morocco struggled to launch a second comeback, consistently reaching the edge of the box but then running up against a tight Tunisian defence.

Tunisia missed several late chances to add a third goal with quick counters, then held out during four minutes of stoppage time to spark wild celebrations.

Tunisia coach Roger Lemerre, whose news conference lasted little more than a minute, said: "Above all I want to thank all the players, who everyday respected the commitments they made to me.

"They have made history. So have the coaching staff and, of course, all Tunisians. The match is only a detail, today is a day of joy for the whole Tunisian nation and I'm delighted about this historic moment. They did it."

Captain Khaled Badra, suspended for the final, lifted the trophy with midfielder Riadh Bouazizi, skipper for the day and outstanding in midfield.

Morocco defender Walid Regragui, meanwhile, summed up the frustration of his team mates, whose slick football deserted them in a nervy start to both halves.

"We didn't feel they were superior to us," Regragui told reporters.

"They didn't give anything away and played to their strengths. Good for them.

"In footballing terms, it's not as if we learned anything today."

Tunisia were hosting the Nations Cup finals for the third time and had been runners-up in 1965.

They were also in the 1996 final in Johannesburg, two years after they had spectacularly failed on home soil in the 1994 edition by failing to progress from the first round.

Dutch Eredivisie

Ajax restored their three-point lead over PSV Eindhoven at the top of the Dutch Eredivisie table with a 2-0 victory at struggling Volendam.

But Ronald Koeman's men shook off the bad start, going ahead two minutes later through Yannis Anastasiou and sealing victory, after several more scares, in the 88th minute with a Thomas Galasek penalty.

Prolific striker Mateja Kezman had scored in the dying seconds to earn PSV three priceless points in a 1-0 defeat of FC Twente.

Kezman had not been firing on all cylinders recently, according to coach Guus Hiddink, but his goal will go a long way to erasing memories of a poor performance during last week's defeat against Ajax.

It seemed as though the Serbo-Montenegrin forward was set for another frustrating evening until he finally beat Twente keeper Cees Paauwe in the 90th minute.

Kezman found himself in a one-on-one with Paauwe and produced a deft chip from the edge of the penalty area to send the home fans into raptures.

Ten-man Feyenoord lost further ground on the leaders after they could only manage a 2-2 draw at ADO Den Haag, a late goal from Cedric van der Gun rescuing a deserved point for the relegation-threatened capital club.

Romeo Castelen put the home side ahead before Robin van Persie equalised and Christian Gyan was sent off for the Rotterdam giants.

Thomas Buffel then surprisingly put the visitors ahead and that looked to be the way it would finish until Van der Gun levelled in the 83rd minute.

RKC Waalwijk piled on more misery for bottom-of-the-table Zwolle, who lost 2-0 and slipped to their 15th league defeat of the season.

NEC eased their relegation fears with an emphatic 4-0 win over 10-man Utrecht.

Andrzej Niedzielan scored twice for NEC with Jarda Simr and Bjorn van der Doelen also on target.

Tom Caluwe struck a dramatic late equaliser to rescue a 1-1 draw for Willem II and keep them ahead of Heerenveen in the race for European football next season.

Marcel Seip's first-half goal appeared to have given the hosts their first victory in three games - which would have brought them level on points with Willem II in the Eredivisie - but Caluwe produced a cool finish to break home hearts.

RBC Roosendaal maintained their outstanding away form in the league this season as goals from Edwin De Graaf and Danny Hesp helped them to their sixth win on the road, a 2-1 at Vitesse Arnhem.

Neither NAC Breda nor Roda JC did anything to support the theory that either could compete at the sharp end of the Eredivisie after a dour 0-0 draw.

NAC Breda 0 Roda JC 0, PSV Eindhoven 1 Twente 0, Heerenveen 1 Willem II 1, Vitesse Arnhem 1 RBC Roosendaal 2, ADO Den Haag 2 Feyenoord 2, Volendam 0 Ajax 2, RKC Waalwijk 2 Zwolle 0, NEC Nijmegen 4 Utrecht 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	**20**	**17**	**1**	**2**	**50**	**18**	**52**
PSV	21	15	4	2	56	16	49
Alkmaar	21	12	3	6	41	21	39
Feyenoord	22	11	6	5	40	31	39
Willem II	22	9	7	6	33	31	34
Twente	21	10	2	9	38	34	32
Heerenveen	20	9	4	7	25	24	31
Roda	20	8	7	5	36	24	31
Roosendaal	21	8	6	7	24	26	30
Waalwijk	22	7	6	9	30	27	27
Utrecht	21	7	6	8	26	29	27
NAC	20	7	5	8	33	31	26
NEC	21	8	1	12	26	33	25
Groningen	20	6	5	9	25	31	23
Den Haag	21	4	5	12	18	43	17
Volendam	21	4	4	13	20	56	16
Vitesse	21	2	9	10	24	36	15
Zwolle	21	1	5	15	11	45	8

English soccer 'needs more Asians'

ENGLISH soccer is not racist but work is still needed to attract greater ethnic minority involvement at all levels of the game, especially from the country's Asian population, said a report published last week.

The Independent Football Commission (IFC) said English soccer needs to be "radically restructured" in order to reflect society at large, with places set aside on the boards of clubs and on the bodies which run the Premier League and Football League.

It added: "The boardrooms of English football remain predominantly white."

Although many English professional clubs have players of Afro-Caribbean origin on their books, the report noted "there are still exceptionally few Asian players in professional football."

The IFC, which was set up by football authorities in 2001 and backed by the British government, said: "If only an Asian player could be seen lifting one of the major club trophies; if only more black and Asian referees stayed the course and didn't find racial comments just one set of abuse too much, and if only there was a black or Asian chairman at a Premier League club."

But IFC chairman David Fraser told a media conference today: "Contrary to some media reports, the IFC does not conclude that football is racist."

But he admitted there was a problem of perception amongst some groups who believed that this was in fact the case.

Fraser stressed that the IFC's interest in racial issues sprung not from "woolly-minded liberalism" but a desire to see that football did not ignore talent from wherever it came.

Real still want Henry, Ruud

REAL MADRID are still keen on getting their hands on Arsenal's Thierry Henry and Manchester United's Ruud van Nistelrooy, coach Carlos Queiroz admitted last week.

France international Henry is on record as saying he prefers to stay with the Gunners but, pressed for his thoughts, Queiroz said he greatly admires both the Arsenal man and Dutchman van Nistelrooy ahead of Italian Francesco Totti.

"At the moment I don't think Totti is Real's top priority. If I had to list my priorities I'd go preferably with van Nistelrooy and Henry as they're just maturing.

"And the French guy is right at the peak of his powers as regards finishing and passing," said Queiroz, initially reluctant to discuss the issue of who would be Real's next star signing.

"I must keep my distance from this issue. These players won't get us any points this season."

Real's sporting director, Jorge Valdano, has previously spoken of his wish to see AS Roma star Totti play alongside Zinedine Zidane but told today's AS daily that they are no longer interested in Totti because his position is already covered by good players.

Real Madrid are still keen on Arsenal's Thierry Henry for next season.

As for Liverpool and England striker Michael Owen, a target earlier in the season as a man who could link up next season with David Beckham, his name has almost disappeared from the list of possibles after a relatively quiet period in the English Premiership.

Cameroon-Nigeria in Martins row

Cameroon and Nigeria are embroiled in a battle over the international future of Inter Milan's Obafemi Martins, days after they met on the pitch in the quarter-finals of the African Nations Cup.

Cameroon, whose reign as African champions was ended by Nigeria in Sunday's match at Monastir, are to investigate claims that Martins is interested in pursuing an international career with them.

Martins pulled out of Nigeria's Nations Cup squad last month and Cameroon Football Federation president Mohamed Iya said he had heard reports that the striker was interested in playing for them instead.

'I have heard these reports and I will certainly investigate,' he said.

Iya said Martins hailed from the Bakassi peninsula, a disputed border area that the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 2002 ruled was Cameroonian territory.

But general secretary of the Nigerian football association, Taiwo Ogunjobi, said on Tuesday: 'There is not one iota of truth in that (the reports). As far as I know he (Martins) is a Nigerian. He is from my own Yoruba tribe.'

Ogunjobi said he had visited Martins in Milan before the start of the Nations Cup finals and the 19-year-old had agreed to play in the tournament in Tunisia.

'I even spoke to his mother and they both agreed, but then when we called him up, he refused to come.'

Martins turned down call-ups last year to play for the Nigeria in Nations Cup qualifiers. He also declined invitations to the country's under-23 team for the All-Africa Games and Olympic qualifiers.

The striker made his Serie A debut for Inter last season and played in the UEFA Champions League, where the Italian club reached the semi-finals.

This season, Martins has scored four goals in 15 Serie A appearances.

Before the Nations Cup finals, Martins said he was putting any thoughts of international football on hold to concentrate on his club career.

French Ligue 1

Monaco were condemned to their first home defeat of the season as unfancied Lille prevailed 1-0 to throw the race for the Ligue 1 title wide open again.

Former coach Claude Puel exacted sweet revenge on his former, bringing an end to the last surviving unbeaten home record in Ligue 1. Matt Moussilou scored a 78th minute winner to give Les Dogues a famous victory.

Paris St Germain took full advantage of Monaco slip up by winning 1-0 at Toulouse to move within five points of the long-time leaders.

PSG had to labour to beat bottom club Toulouse but Danijel Ljuboja's first-half goal did the trick for the capital club.

Sochaux hit a hurdle in their pursuit of Champions League football but will nonetheless be relieved to grab a point from a 1-1 home draw with Bordeaux.

Sochaux had only been beaten once in more than two years at the Stade Bonal but looked doomed when Pablo Francia gave Bordeaux the lead with just five minutes to play.

However, in injury time it was all square again when Wilson Oruma grabbed a point for Les Jaunes et Bleus.

Guingamp continued their resurrection in Ligue 1 with a 1-0 win over Bastia, racking up another vital victory to move out of the relegation zone.

Gregory Leca's early goal proved enough for Metz to steal a march on fellow relegation candidates Montpellier 1-0 and leap-frog them in Ligue 1.

It was a poor start for new Montpellier coach Robert Nouzaret who quit his job as Ivory Coast boss last week to take over from the sacked Gerard Bernardet.

It was Montpellier's third-consecutive defeat and plunges them into the bottom three with a miserable haul of one point from their last 10 games.

The all-important goal came after just five minutes and was just reward for an enterprising start by the visitors.

In-form Viorel Moldovan scored twice to take his tally to four goals in his last four games and lead Les Canaris to an impressive 3-1 win over mid-table rivals Nice.

After Gregory Pujol had put the home side ahead in the sixth minute, Romanian international Moldovan put his side two up in the 29th minute before Christophe Meslin pulled one back for the visitors seven minutes before the break.

Ajaccio picked up another point in their battle to stay out of the danger zone but will feel they could have had all three points against the visitors from Strasbourg.

Daniel Jeandupeux started his reign as Le Mans coach with a battling goalless draw with Marseille.

Lens beat Rennes 2-1 with goals from Olivier Thomert and Charly Coridon eclipsing the Bretons who replied through Frederic Piquionne.

Sochaux 1 Bordeaux 1, Le Mans 0 Marseille 0, Guingamp 1 Bastia 0, Monaco 0 Lille 1, Montpellier 0 Metz 1, Nantes 3 Nice 1, Toulouse 0 Paris St Germain 1, Lens 2 Rennes 1, Ajaccio 0 Strasbourg 0, Auxerre 1 Lyon 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco	**24**	**15**	**6**	**3**	**39**	**17**	**51**
Lyon	24	14	5	5	41	19	47
PSG	24	13	7	4	34	18	46
Auxerre	24	14	2	8	42	20	44
Sochaux	24	12	6	6	35	27	42
Marseille	24	13	2	9	32	25	41
Nantes	24	11	4	9	27	21	37
Bordeaux	24	10	6	8	25	26	36
Nice	24	8	11	5	25	21	35
Lens	24	11	2	11	22	37	35
Lille	24	8	7	9	25	26	31
Strasbourg	24	8	6	10	36	34	30
Rennes	24	7	8	9	27	25	29
Bastia	24	7	7	10	25	33	28
Metz	24	6	6	12	17	25	24
Ajaccio	24	6	6	12	21	33	24
Guingamp	24	7	3	14	21	36	24
Montpellier	24	6	4	14	29	45	22
Mans	24	4	8	12	18	36	20
Toulouse	24	4	6	14	16	33	18

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